

Kingship, Conquest, and *Patria*

*Literary and Cultural Identities in Medieval
French and Welsh Arthurian Romance*



Kristen Lee Over

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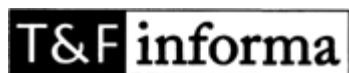
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Series Editor's Foreword

Far from providing just a musty whiff of yesteryear, research in Medieval Studies enters the new century as fresh and vigorous as never before. Scholars representing all disciplines and generations are consistently producing works of research of the highest caliber, utilizing new approaches and methodologies. Volumes in the Medieval History and Culture series include studies on individual works and authors of Latin and vernacular literatures, historical personalities and events, theological and philosophical issues, and new critical approaches to medieval literature and culture.

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Francis G. Gentry

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Introduction

A growing collection of critical work in the field of Medieval Studies grounds the exploration of both medieval colonialisms and the processes of medieval nation-building in postcolonial thought.¹ Amid a rich variety of topic and approach, common to all is a defensive need to challenge the temporal and historical limits of postcolonial precepts, to contest the lingering modern theoretical assumption that the medieval period was necessarily prenational, or, to use Etienne Balibar's phrase, "non-national" (88).² Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (36–46) has proved particularly influential in effecting the kind of "sacred alterity" and "polarized periodization" that understands the Middle Ages to be essentially prior to and separate from the growth and development of imagined national identities.³ Such a modern-medieval dichotomy relegates, for instance, the "linguistic colonialism" of the twelfth-century vernacularization of western culture to the realm of "haphazard development."⁴ Anderson would strip the medieval historiography and romance to be discussed in the following chapters of any deliberate project of writing and formulating national identities, imposing an essentialist restriction on ideological construction that Ian Short and M. T. Clanchy have effectively refuted.

Such trends and exchanges within the field of Medieval Studies assume the existence in the Middle Ages of both nations and national writing; so it is worth noting that the theoretical and historical problem of the medieval nation is just that—a problem. In the first half of the twentieth century, historians reduced any kind of national sentiment in the Middle Ages to naive tribalism: prior to the French Revolution, national or religious fervor existed only in a vegetative state of sleep or incubation.⁵ Yet the medieval concept of *natio* grouped peoples according to common language, and, in that narrow sense, nations abounded certainly from the eighth and ninth centuries (Guenée 19; Werner, "Les Nations" 287–88). By 1970, Karl E. Werner acknowledged an established *communis opinio* of medievalists who regarded the twelfth century as the era of "national awakening;"⁶ but Werner showed that it is only in reference to the unifying influence of the Church that we can apply any twelfth-century sense of *patria communis* to the great nation of France, "à la grande patrie de tout le royaume de France" ("Les Nations" 292–97). Political nations were more localized, adhering discrete groups or communities within "France" of Franks, Burgundians, Aquitanians, Bretons, Normans, and Flemish.⁷

Bernard Guenée has likewise demonstrated the early proliferation in Western Europe of political communities of governed territories—what he

defines as *états*, states—that in turn fed the growth of ethnic communities, or “nations” joined by a common language (18–19). The principal question for Guenée, as for Werner, was not whether medieval states and nations existed in and of themselves—they surely did, albeit without the sense of racial purity so essential to our own modern definitions of nation⁸—but rather when those political and ethnic communities came to coincide: when, for instance, can we speak of a French nation-state in the sense of the modern hexagon? For both historians, it was not until the beginning of the fourteenth century that state and nation merged into a *natione gallicus* (Guenée 20–26). For Guenée, and more recently for Josep Llobera, the French state preceded and created the nation (27; 356).

Other historians have located a kernel of medieval nations in the unifying force of descent myths. Kathleen Davis, for one, has identified the “national strategies” of King Alfred’s ninth-century English mythmaking and its “retrospective historiography,” defining the medieval nation as a people linked not only by political institutions but by geography, language, and a belief in common descent and shared history (614). Susan Reynolds, although loath to use the term “nationalism,” has charted what she terms the “regnal solidarity” that created an ideological kingdom of France well before the political developments of the fourteenth century welded together the modern hexagon (389; 382n31). Peter Haidu similarly contextualized the *Song of Rotundas* the “earliest ideological act” toward the establishment of what becomes the nascent nation-state of Philip Augustus, showing that the literary fiction of unifying kingship dramatically preceded its material development (*Subject of Violence* 219, 111). Haidu, however, like Patrick Geary, differs notably from Reynolds on the “ethnogenetic”⁹ fabric of the medieval nation. For Reynolds, a proliferation of origin myths commixed a sense of political unity with common ethnic descent, constructing an enduring and “biologically homogeneous” political and cultural community (379). Haidu proposed instead a more vaguely imagined, “syncretic” model of the medieval nation as “a collection and fusion of different races” (*Subject of Violence* 151). Essential for the present study is a recognition that formulations of group identity—whether ultimately homogeneous or syncretic—were (and continue to be) ideological constructs, manufactured in response to an immediate political need.¹⁰

It is in this sense that I consider many of the texts discussed here to be representative of distinctly national writing, whether the ninth-century *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain), Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *Historia regum Britannie*, or later Arthurian romance. The tremendous political changes underwent on both sides of the Channel from roughly the sixth to the thirteenth centuries must remain largely outside the scope of this study, but they nevertheless form the basis for the triangulated, “antagonistic intimacies” that develop between continental Capetian France, Angevin England, and Wales, intimacies predicated on conquest and on the

oppositional discourses that stem from conquest (Ingham 10n13). The myth of insular unity, for instance, the myth of a whole and undivided Britain, is recycled differently by the different cultures that share a fascination with King Arthur. The various depictions of Arthur's kingship thus emphasize the far from monolithic aspect of medieval nations, a variety and richness reflected in the identifying terms used throughout the following chapters and that deserve clarification from the outset. Essential to early Welsh national writing is a belief in common British descent. The Welsh word *Brytanyeit* (the British), and the Latin word *Bretones* (the Britons), designated insular Welsh-speakers; and although early medieval Wales did not extend the length and breadth of modern Britain, these terms reflect a cultural myth of island-wide dominion. Already in the seventh-century collection of epic poems *Y Gododdin*, *Ynys Brydain* (the Island of Britain) is distinct from *Lloegr* (England) and differentiates foreign Saxon invaders from native insular inhabitants. *Cymry* (the Welsh) is used with insistent frequency in the tenth-century *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain), but by the twelfth century—after waves of Saxon, Scandinavian, and Norman invasions—Geoffrey of Monmouth negatively defines the Welsh in terms of territorial and political loss: defeated by the Saxons and no longer rulers over the Island of Britain, *Britones* (Welsh-speaking Britons) become *Gualenses* (the Welsh).

Bede in the eighth century writes of *gens Anglorum* (the English), and by the ninth century King Alfred describes his conglomeration of kingdoms as *Angelcynn* (England), unified by inhabitants who speak *Englisc* (Davis 617–18). As such, I refer infrequently to the English; but I do designate the insular territory of Francophone kings as Anglo-Norman or Anglo-Angevin England.¹¹

Combining medieval French and Welsh studies with literary and historical analysis, the following chapters explore the relation of political power to literary form, specifically transcribing the sociopolitical contexts of thirteenth-century native Wales and late twelfth-century England and France onto the “new” King Arthur of romance. Laying a broad literary and historical background, this study builds toward a consideration of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the three analogous Middle Welsh prose tales; focusing primarily on opening sequences, on the introductory frames of the Arthurian world, I treat these eight romances as both cohesive and interrelated while also recognizing their integrity as two separate, national corpora.

Though questions of origins have in the past compared these works almost exclusively in terms of their common narrative detail,¹² I focus on their shared Arthurian framework while directing considerable attention to their rich literary and sociopolitical singularities. One thing that strikingly distinguishes the later Welsh romances from their French counterparts, for instance, is their status as rerenderings into Welsh of British Arthurian material filtered through Chrétien de Troyes. Nowhere is this exchange more culturally charged than in the portrait of central insular monarchy represented

by the figure of King Arthur. Yet surprisingly, no study has sought to contextualize this singular evolution of Arthurian romance in terms of contemporary regional history.¹³ Armel Diverres, building from the work of P. S. Noble, has emphasized the significance of the “the historical background against which all five [of Chrétiens] romances were composed” (“Arthur” 63), but this is a concluding point in his article. He does not include *y rhamantau* in his consideration, and he does not elaborate on his suggestions that the deteriorated Arthur of Chrétiens final three romances “may indicate the king of England’s decline and French hostility towards him,” that it “may have reflected the antagonism between Philip Augustus and his vassals on the one hand and Henry II on the other ...” (“Arthur” 63, 64). Other than in limited fashion, no recent study has placed these two romance corpora in any kind of related political context. This book aims to do both: to follow up on Diverres’ question of historical background and to enlarge the field to encompass both Chrétiens romances and *y rhamantau*. What follows is a specific look at how the depiction of Arthur’s weak centralized kingship might translate both in Chrétiens France and in thirteenth-century native Wales. Arthur’s literary overlordship, plagued by internal dispute and external violence, would resonate differently with an audience of Champagnois or Flemish vassals to the Capetian king of France than with an audience of Welsh nobles guarding their customs, law, and language from the encroaching cultural and political pressure of Anglo-Angevin rule.

Integral to this study, then, and the subject of [Part I](#) (“Arthurian Tradition Before Chrétien de Troyes”), is a careful look at the diverse span of Arthur’s in early insular literary tradition leading up to and including the *Historia regum Britannie* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. The diverse material examined in [Chapter One](#) insists not so much on Arthur as on the unity of Britain and its distinction from Saxon invaders, a corpus of national writing that in many ways defines itself in reaction to aggressive sixth-century conquest. [Chapter Two](#) focuses exclusively on Geoffrey’s twelfth-century history—itsself a history of conquest written in the wake of the Norman Conquest—in which the familiar emphasis on British unity fuses with the glory of Arthur’s kingship: of the Arthur’s examined in [Part I](#), it is most notably Geoffrey’s national defender of British *patria* who comes to exercise the kind of conquering and unifying sovereignty that perpetuates the myth of insular British wholeness. Very different from the later romance tradition born across the Channel, six centuries of insular Arthurian narrative create a distinct British cultural and regnal identity out of a history of conquest: it is the martial glory and conquering spirit of Geoffrey’s centralized national monarchy that serves to isolate Chrétiens later romance Arthur as a distinct and radical departure from insular tradition.

Yet Geoffrey’s is ultimately a history of political loss, and the ambiguity of centralized kingship and the sovereignty it wields complicates the glory of Arthur’s reign with the abject decline that follows. Such a dynamic and

ambiguous combination of both unification and disintegration will likewise be shown to dominate the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.

With the premise that vernacular literary production is in this instance inseparable from the construction of political and cultural ideologies, [Part II](#) (“Conquest and National Cultural Production”) outlines some of the cultural and political ties that joined England, Wales, and Northern France from the mid twelfth century through the thirteenth, highlighting the antagonistic and aggressive aspect of these close political relationships. Focusing primarily on Angevin expansion, but also considering aspects of Capetian centralization and Welsh resistance, [Part II](#) suggests that sovereign territorial claims, whether expansionist or defensive, go hand in hand with both political identity and literary production. These two chapters additionally address literary patronage to situate the Arthur of both Chrétien and the Welsh *rhamantau* as a countertrend to the literary histories commissioned by Henry II Plantagenet. Despite the uncertainties of anonymous prose tales, I consider the Welsh perspective by linking the romances with roughly contemporaneous literary production that vied for an all-Wales cultural and political distinction from within Anglo-Angevin overlordship. [Part II](#) thus elaborates a sociohistorical context for the romance adoption of a weak Arthur, one that recognizes insular colonialism and conquest on the one hand and national literary resistance on the other hand.

Looking closely at opening sequences, [Part III](#) (“The New King Arthur of French and Welsh Romance”) traces Arthur's decline in the eight romances. Far from reprising Geoffrey's icon of native British kingship, Chrétien seems deliberately to tarnish the insular hero transmitted by Wace at the request of Henry II. Indebted to and yet wildly divergent from the king of Geoffrey's Latin and Wace's Anglo-Norman, Chrétien categorically rejects the savior myth of eventual British victory over foreign oppressors, creating instead the weak King Arthur of medieval French literary tradition. Chrétiens Arthur, in other words, and the Welsh tales after him, strike more as a trenchant criticism of insular kingship than as a product of Henry Us historiography, and the weakened insular king of French and Welsh romance takes on an ironic and decidedly anti-monarchic tone.

The weakness of Chrétien's Arthur is of primary interest to me in this book, as it is precisely this impotent and vulnerable version of centralized insular kingship that survives the selective adaptation of the Welsh romancers.¹⁴ By adopting Chrétien's tales replete with weak Arthur, the Welsh romances import into Welsh literary tradition a version of kingship that proves to be markedly at odds with the native warrior of either early poetry, of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, or of the British history popularized in the later twelfth century by several Welsh translations of Geoffrey's *Historia*.¹⁵ The Arthur of Welsh romance makes a mockery of foreign overlordship as well as of then current Latin anecdotes of Arthur's eventual return and victory.¹⁶ The Welsh *rhamantau* seem also to insist on the deleterious effect of foreign influence on

native Welsh images of sovereignty and successful rule, “countercolonizing” in Arthur’s exaggerated fall the hegemonic processes of cultural assimilation (Cohen, “Introduction: Midcolonial” 1). In the context of contemporary Welsh history, this imported Arthur and his weak and declining centralized overlordship play with images of kingship and suzerainty at a time when the preeminence of the prince of Gwynedd was forging an emergent Welsh polity despite contrary efforts of the Anglo-Angevin kings of England. I hesitate at this point to propose that the waning overlordship depicted in Welsh *rhamant* traces native support for federated Welsh resistance to aggressive and interventionist English suzerainty. But I nonetheless propose that the Arthur of *y rhamantau* plays with contemporary opinion of both native and Anglo-Angevin rule.

Identifying the romance Arthur as emblematic of a cross-cultural, cross-Channel alliance between disparate literary traditions, this broad study seeks to offer tentative, speculative answers to why romance so abruptly alters a cultural icon of twelfth-century historiography. To be sure, despite a shared image of weak central kingship, the French and Welsh corpora boast distinct native styles, Chrétien perfecting trends of verse and character development, as well as significantly expanding themes of love and marriage, the Welsh tales resisting with wit and economy the *amplificatio* of French verse form. Yet far from native, the Arthur of Welsh romance is recognizably continental—and, to a Welsh audience, arguably redolent with indices of an invasive, foreign cultural influence. This study thus concludes with a chapter focused more exclusively on the dynamic of cultural difference that distances these two corpora despite their remarkable similarities and mutual participation in undercutting insular Anglo-Angevin dominance.

PART I

Arthurian Tradition before Chrétien de Troyes

Prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth's enormously influential *Historia regum Britannia* (c.1138), there are limited and often enigmatic references to Arthur. Arthur in fact proves all but absent from early Welsh poetry, and prior to the *Historia* far more chronicles omit than include him, so that Geoffrey's warrior-king provides the most complete medieval portrait of Arthur available as a source for both continental and insular romance. The sixth-century Welsh praise poetry ascribed to Aneirin and Taliesin frequently eulogizes warriors such as Cynon and Owain ap Urien, for example—both of whom get absorbed into later Arthurian romance—but only one stanza of this poetry mentions the name Arthur, and some recent scholarship doubts its authenticity (e. g., Sims-Williams, “Early Welsh Arthurian Poems”). In Welsh tradition, Arthur is not the national savior, not the *rex quondam rex futurus* of later material. Though at least two twelfth-century historians prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth document a continental Breton belief in Arthur's eventual return,¹ the tenth-century *Armes Prydein* (Prophecy of Britain) foretells the coming not of Arthur but of Cynan and Cadwaladr, two leaders prophesied to expel the Saxons and deliver the whole of Britain back to the Welsh. Prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth, in other words, native insular tradition appears to have generated very few tales of Arthur and none of his eventual return. Prolific in both Welsh and Latin insular tradition, however, is a self-conscious sense of ethnic British difference and possible independence from foreign invaders, so that long prior to Geoffrey's king there exists a diverse corpus of insular material that responds to the aggression and violence of Saxon conquest with narrative accounts of British identity.

It is precisely the long history of conquest that helps distinguish the development of insular Arthurian narrative from the later romance tradition launched by the continental poet Chrétien de Troyes. To be sure, prophetic literary images of paradigmatic Welsh warriors and successful native rulers of Britain do not reflect the political reality of Wales from the sixth to the ninth centuries. Though war was common, united effort and independence from foreign influence were much less so, and already by the sixth-century age of Gildas the Saxons had successfully appropriated much of Britain.² Thus during the period of hostile invasion and colonization which followed the fifth-century departure of the Romans, the earliest Welsh hero tales and praise poetry, including the first limited literary references to Arthur, glorify the

potential for British unification and independence—an image of national hope later associated almost entirely with the King Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.

Prior to Geoffrey, however, vernacular references to Arthur as a single native ruler prove sparse, and Latin chronicles roughly contemporaneous with the period of Saxon invasion and settlement add nothing to the literary figure of Arthur. Gregory of Tours's sixth-century *Historia Francorum* includes no mention of Arthur, not even as one defeated. Nor does the sixth-century Welsh cleric Gildas, writing by his own account in the absence of a British leader capable of containing the Saxon onslaught. Likewise Bede, chronicling the Anglo-Saxons in Britain at a time of Saxon control, failed to write of Arthur as either friend or foe in his eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. Most chroniclers in the three hundred years following Bede omit Arthur from British history, as do several of Fletcher's “ambitious” historians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.³ Yet all write of the British people and of the Island of Britain as a past and potential native whole.

However sparse, pre-Galfridian Arthurian material forms a remarkably varied body of national writing—secular Welsh poetry, native Welsh prose narrative, Latin historiography, and British-Latin hagiography—that establishes the literary tradition of Arthur to be both deep-rooted and broad in appeal long before Geoffrey combines the myth of insular British wholeness with the figure of a single dominant native king. The variety and vitality of this early material differs markedly from the portrait of Geoffrey's British champion, and so the purpose of this initial chapter is to gain some insight into the highly selective yet detailed perspective of the Arthurian sections of Geoffrey's *Historia*. Rather than distinguishing between Latin “histories” of nations and saints and vernacular “fictions” about Welsh heroes,⁴ what follows is a brief chronology of the most significant pre-Galfridian Arthurian material.⁵

Abstract for the chapter but web only.

Chapter One

Pre-Galfridian Latin and Vernacular Arthurian Narrative

GILDAS (C. 540)

As the oldest British account of the Saxon invasion available to later writers, the sixth-century *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, written by the Welsh monk Gildas, offers a more religious than political explanation for the fall of Roman Britain and the end to “Roman world order” (Hanning 44–62). Even so, throughout his treatise Gildas reinforces a notion of racial and ethnic difference between his own British people and the invading Saxons, constructing what I would call distinct and national identities out of a hostile and sustained clash between indigenous and foreign communities. Gildas lived and wrote in the turbulent world before newly formed Saxon kingdoms achieved stability in the late sixth century, and he interprets the defeat and invasion of his people as divine retribution for the collective sin of the British, both their “tyrannical” secular rulers and decadent clerics.¹

Arthur earns no mention in the *De excidio*, though the infamous *liber querulus* covers the period in which both Bede and Nennius later record him fighting and defeating Saxons. Stephen Knight has made much of this omission, suggesting that it would have constituted a damning insult to contemporary military leaders, and as such indicates a rift between the interests of ecclesiastical and secular powers (*ALS*, esp. [ch. 1](#)). Arthur's absence perhaps also begs the question of Arthur's prominence as a national figure to Romano-British churchmen of the sixth century. Gildas leaves anonymous several figures named in later histories, so that only one fifth-century Briton is named in what would be the Arthurian section of his text. That single named Briton is Ambrosius Aurelianus, through whom Gildas praises Britain's Roman past while severely criticizing his own contemporaries.² Michael Winterbottom has suggested that Gildas thus “spotlight[s] the inferiority of [Ambrosius'] living descendants,” one of whom would have been the Arthur of the Nennian history (15Int25:3).³

Leading up to his introduction of Ambrosius, Gildas rebukes an unnamed “tyrant” and his counselors for “blindly” and “stupidly” enlisting foreign Saxon mercenaries in an insular war against the Picts and Scots:

Turn omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno caecantur, adinve-nientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo

hominibusque inuisi, quasi in caulas lupi, in insulam ad retundendas aquilonales gentes intromitterentur. Quo utique nihil ei usquam perniciosius nihilque amarius factum est. O altissimam sensus caliginem! o desperabilem crudamque mentis hebetudinem! Quos propensius morte, cum abessent, tremebant, sponte, ut ita dicam, sub unius tecti culmine invitabant.... (23:1–2)

Then all the members of the council, together with the proud tyrant, were struck blind; the guard—or rather the method of destruction—they devised for our land was that the ferocious Saxons (name not to be spoken!), hated by man and God, should be let into the island like wolves into the fold, to beat back the peoples of the north. Nothing more destructive, nothing more bitter has ever befallen the land. How utter the blindness of their minds! How desperate and crass the stupidity! Of their own free will they invited under the same roof a people whom they feared worse than death even in their absence....

Extending a self-destructive and, to Gildas, criminal invitation to a land-hungry enemy, the British condemn themselves as prey to the beasts of Germania, described variously as a barbarian wolf-pack, cubs of a savage lioness, and troops of Saxon dogs (ch 23). Political misjudgment becomes here evidence of spiritual decay, and as Saxon aid quickly turns to violent domination, Gildas writes of the “just punishment” meted out to the British who had impiously desecrated and polluted what God had originally bestowed (24:1). Gildas writes of his British people as the “latter-day Israel” (*praesentem Israelem* 26:1), the Chosen who eventually return to God's favor after a cycle of abrogated covenant and divine retribution. Thus the “wretched survivors” of Saxon raids, scattered and hiding in the farthest reaches of the island (25:1), swarm from their suffering “like bees”⁴ to *dux* Ambrosius Aurelianus, sole Romano-British survivor of the Saxon invasion, symbol of a renewed favor after prolonged affliction.⁵ “Under him,” writes Gildas, “our people regained their strength, and challenged the victors to battle. The Lord assented, and the battle went their way” (... *cuius nunc temporibus nostris suboles magnopere avita bonitate degeneravit, vires capessunt, victores provocantes ad proelium: quis victoria domino annuente cessit*, 25:3). Yet Gildas claims to have been born two generations later, during the time of Ambrosius' grandchildren, an age when the British had once again fallen into weakness and moral degeneration. In the year of Gildas' birth, the British defeat the Saxons for the final time at the battle of Mount Badon (26:1), the victory with which Nennius will later credit Arthur.⁶

Secular rulers as much as decadent churchmen earn reproof, but Gildas reserves special condemnation for a single ruler, Maglocunus (Maelgwn), and his appetite for the flattery of poets, accrediting their lies with the weaknesses of native rule. Gildas distinguishes between *dei laudes* and the lies of *praecones*—a disputed term often translated “poets,” rendered “criminals” by Win-terbottom—damning both Maelgwn Gwynedd and his bards for succumbing to the seduction of false earthly praise (Sims-Williams, “Gildas and Vernacular Poetry” 192n155). Known as *insularis draco* (the dragon of Anglesey), Maelgwn may have cleansed Britain of “many tyrants,” yet *more*

molossi aegri (like a sick hound) he returns to his own vomit of evil, wicked sin (33:1, 34:5–6). To *ecclesiasticae mebdiae* (the melodious music of the church), Maelgwn instead prefers

... furciferorum [quae nihil sunt] referto mendaciis simulque spumanti flegmate proximos quosque roscidaturo, praeconum ore ritu bacchan-tium concrepante, ita ut vas dei quondam in ministerio praeparatum ver-tatur in zabuli Organum, quodque honore caelesti putabatur dignum merito proiciatur in tartan barathrum. (34:6)

... empty praises ... from the mouths of criminals who grate on the hearing like raving hucksters—mouths stuffed with lies and liable to bedew bystanders with their foaming phlegm. Hence a vessel that was once being prepared for the service of God is turned into an instrument of the devil, and what was once thought worthy of heavenly honours is rightly cast into the pit of Hell.

In direct address to the Welsh leader, Gildas lists the iniquities that debase Maelgwn's success as protector of Britain (33–36). He seems tacitly to condemn secular Welsh praise poetry, and by referring to Maelgwn as *insularis draco* Gildas not only demonstrates a certain familiarity with the vocabulary of early Welsh poetry but also sounds a pointed echo meant to discount a genre of national praise apparently very much at odds with his own.⁷ Essential here is not only the early, strident sense of Britain as a place and a people defined against a history of foreign conquest. Equally integral to Gildas' scathing account are opposing king portraits (Ambrosius, the unnamed tyrant, Maelgwn), and the role of insular sovereignty in ultimately unifying or fragmenting his native land.

THE URIEN AND OWEIN POEMS OF TALIESIN (C. 600)

In his edition of *The Poems of Taliesin*, Sir Ifor Williams identified twelve poems composed by the historical sixth-century *cynfardd* (early bard) Taliesin, known for his praise of the Welsh chieftain Urien of Rheged.⁸ Eight of these poems praise Urien; three, Urien's contemporaries Gwallawg and Cynan Garwyn; and one eulogizes Urien's son Owain, who later becomes absorbed into Arthurian tradition as the hero of both Chrétien de Troves' *Yvain* and the Welsh *ladles y Ffynnwawn*. Williams believes all twelve to have been “sung” in the second half of the sixth century, and they thus offer a functional, professional, and secular counterpoint to Gildas' scathing portrait of the same period.

Far from the critical hatred of Gildas, and far also from the “foaming phlegm” of lying sycophants, the eight poems of Taliesin to Urien offer a composite of the ideal secular ruler. Absent is any rhetoric of national defeat and collective sin. Instead, these poems offer a portrait of Urien as protector and defender of Catraeth⁹ and Rheged, unmatched in warrior prowess, patron of poets and generous gift-giver, feared by rivals and indefatigable in battle well into gray-haired old age.¹⁰ Renowned like his father in song and fame (*iscell kerdglyt cbtuawr*, X:5), Owain too earns Taliesin's praise as one who

“severely punished” the “host of Lloegr” (*lloegyr... nifer/... Owein ae cospesyn drut*, X:13, 17), attacking the Saxons “like a pack of wolves attacking sheep” (*mal cnut [y]n dylut deueit*, X:18).¹¹ With the “nature” of his father and his ancestors (*eissyluty tatae teit*, X: 10), Owein killed enemies as easily as he slept;¹² he gave horses to his men (*rodei veirchy eircheit*, X:20); his “whetted spears” had no equal.¹³ In the poetry of Taliesin both Urien and Owein, as the feared but generous warrior-lords of Rheged, embody the heroic ideal of Welsh secular kingship of the Old North. Though here, in the early Welsh material, it is not Arthur who sets this standard, such praise as that bestowed on Urien and Owein offer precedent for Geoffrey of Monmouth's later portrayal of Arthur's paradigmatic reign.

Tales of Urien as well as the work of other sixth-century Welsh bards were indeed well known in clerical circles. If the contemporaneous Gildas proved hostile to native rulers and their lying court poets, the compiler of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* shared no such bias, recording the fame of four early Welsh *cynfeirdd* (old bards) in the same chapter in which British kings—Outigern and later *Mailcunus magnus rex* (King Maelgwn the Great, of Gwynedd)—fight “bravely” against the English:

Tunc Outigirn in illo tempore fortiter dimicabat contra gentem Anglorum. Tunc Talhaern Tataguen in poemate claruit; et Neirin, et Taliessin, et Bluchbard, et Cian, qui vocatur Gueinth Guaut, simul uno tempore in poemate Britannico claruerunt.¹⁴

At that time Outigern then fought bravely against the English nation. Then Talhaearn Tad Awen [Iron Brow, Father of Poetic Inspiration] was famed in poetry; and Aneirin and Taliesin [Beautiful Brow] and Bluchbard [Beardless Poet] and Cian, known as Gueinth Guaut [Puppy, He Who Made Song], were all simultaneously famed in British verse.

The *Historia Brittonum* intertwines Britain's famous bards with leaders defiant against Saxon control, detailing in the following chapter Urien's allied stance with Rhydderch Hen, Gwallawg, and Morcant against the North Saxons, his three-day blockade on the island of *Meteawd* (Lindisfame), and finally his betrayal and assassination at the instigation of Morcant *pro invidia, quia in ipso prae omnibus regibus virtus maxima erat instaurazione belli* (“from jealousy, because [Urien's] military skill and generalship surpassed that of all the other kings” *HB* §63). Urien's renown and that of his poet Aneirin, linked as they are in concurrent chapters of the *Historia*,¹⁵ offer further display of a literary and political sense of Britain that was shared between professional court panegyric and clerical production, of long-standing literary traditions familiar to both vernacular and Latin writers well prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth.

ANEIRIN, Y GODODDIN (C. 600)

Despite the omission of Arthur from Gildas' British history, Welsh elegiac poetry of roughly the same period already depicts Arthur with the

exaggeration of legend, suggesting the existence of a vast corpus of oral material that sang his praises and told his story in the manner of Taliesin. Part of that oral corpus survives in a war-song attributed to Taliesin's contemporary, the northern *cynfardd* Aneirin. *Y Gododdin*, the core of what is now commonly referred to as “the Gododdin poems,” eulogizes warriors slain in the disastrous defeat of Mynyddog's pan-British warband. The entire tribe of the Gododdin, Welsh-speakers of the Edinburgh region of southern Scotland, marches south to recover territory lost to *y Saisson*, the Saxons of Northumbria, and is annihilated at the battle of Catraeth (c. 570). The poem refers only once to Arthur, as a well-known standard of noble generosity and warrior prowess. This is arguably the oldest surviving reference to Arthur:

Ef gwant tra thrichant echasaf,
 Ef lladdai a pherfedd ac eithaf,
 Oedd gwiw ym mlaen llu Uariaf,
 Goddolai o haid meirch y gaeaf.
 Gochorai brain du ar fur caer
 Cyn ni bai ef Arthur.
 Rhwng cyfnerthi yng nghlysur,
 Yng nghynnor, gwernor Gwawrddur. (stanza 99, II 967–74)

He charged before three hundred of the finest,
 He cut down both center and wing,
 He excelled in the forefront of the noblest host,
 He gave gifts of horses from the herd in winter.
 He fed black ravens on the rampart of a fortress
 Though he was no Arthur.
 Among the powerful ones in battle,
 In the front rank, Gwawrddur was a palisade.

Described in superlatives as first of the finest and leader of the noblest, Gwawrddur (Hard Dawn) distributes gifts to his men as generously as his sword provides corpses for scavenging ravens. He is first to charge, always positioned *tra*, “before” the host, *ym mlaen*, “in the forefront,” *yng nghynnor*, “in the front rank;” he is ubiquitous in battle, *gwernor*, a protective “palisade” attacking the midst as well as the flank of the enemy. Strong, courageous, and generous, Gwawrddur possesses all the qualities of a great epic hero—save success in battle. *Y Gododdin* recounts disastrous military failure and the decimation of a tribe of people, and in such light the backhanded praise of Gwawrddur—he was a fine warrior but no Arthur—laments not only the loss of the entire Edinburgh retinue but the apparent end to an age when such a one as Arthur might have turned the tide of Catraeth and prolonged the existence of the Gododdin. This is a poem devoid of prophetic hope, and though the use of Arthur's name clearly represents a standard unmet by the slain Gwawrddur, its legendary greatness is not that of the people's deliverer.

Precise dating of *Y Gododdin* in general and of stanza 99 in particular has defied scholars. The poem survives in a single thirteenth-century manuscript (Cardiff MS 1) as two texts in separate scribal hands—the A text,

written in thirteenth-century Middle Welsh orthography, and the B text, written in a more primitive, archaic, Old Welsh orthography. The A text is made up of the roughly eighty alliterative, rhyming stanzas of *Y Gododdin* and four separate poems or *Gorchaneu* (*gorchan* “great song”).¹⁶ The B text recopies seventeen stanzas from the A text and includes twenty one new stanzas (per Jarmans edition), all in a much older orthography. Many regard the older B text to date in part to the early seventh century and as a whole to no later than the ninth.¹⁷ Such a gap between original composition and final manuscript version allows for up to six centuries of textual accretion and interpolation, and so, despite the fact that the reference to Arthur in stanza 99 occurs only in the older B orthography,¹⁸ dating remains for some scholars problematic and difficult to secure prior to the late thirteenth-century date of the manuscript itself. Patrick Sims-Williams, for instance, discounts the Arthurian stanza of *Y Gododdin* as an unreliable source for early Welsh Arthurian poems and romance.¹⁹ David Howlett, either ignoring the stanza entirely or remaining unaware of its existence, similarly removes the reference from consideration, declaring incorrectly that no written vernacular source names Arthur prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth.²⁰ Such skepticism as to an early date may not be entirely unfounded. Certainly, paired as it is in this stanza with Gwawrddur, as it also is in *Kanu y Meirch* (Songs of the Horses),²¹ and as it is likewise paired with Gwythur in *Englynion y Beddau* (Stanzas of the Graves), Arthur's name can appear to be incidental to the interest of rhyme, its inclusion hardly testament to his early cultural importance as a measure of Welsh poetic praise (T. Jones, “The Black Book of Carmarthen”).

Yet by the time the A and B texts were brought together and preserved in Cardiff MS 1 (c. 1275), Welsh tradition supported the poem's claim to historical authenticity (*Y Gododdin* lxviii). Thus the use of Arthur as a standard of excellence and as a remembrance of past military victory, whether original to the poem or a later addition, offers a portrait of Arthur very different from that found in post-Galfridian Arthurian narrative. In effect, the *Gododdin* stanza becomes perhaps more intriguing as a later (post-Galfridian) addition to the poem, for if Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* did influence this reference, it did so without the prophetic promise of Arthur's future return and eventual victory. And if added during the later twelfth-century explosion of Arthurian narrative, it escaped the shadow of Arthurian decline which characterizes Welsh romance and native prose narrative, choosing as it does to name Arthur as an alternative to ethnic annihilation rather than as an equally-doomed agent of defeat. In this poem of ultimate loss, of the destruction of a war-band and a tribe that had no Arthur, we are extremely far from Sims-Williams' description of early Arthurian poetry as a “literature of entertainment,” far from what he terms an “escap[e] into a never-never land of idealized conflicts and magical quests” (“Early Welsh Arthurian Poems” 61).

With only a single Arthurian stanza, *Y Gododdin* offers much insight into

the limits of early Arthurian tradition. The poem eulogizes one hero more frequently than any other, naming Cynon eleven times in its one hundred and one stanzas.²² Twenty-four references to the battle site Catraeth, fifteen to the tribe of the Gododdin, and fourteen to the absent leader Mynyddog are the only other proper names that recur more often than that of Cynon.²³ Along with Cadraith and Cadlew of Cadnant, lines from the *Gorchan Cynfelyn* name Cynon as one of the three warriors who returned from the battle (Jarman, lines 1111–1116). As such, Cynon is touted even in the Gododdin's defeat as a contemporary exemplar of warrior prowess, a living heir to the Arthurian past alluded to in stanza 99 of *Y Gododdin*.

A reputed eyewitness to the annihilation of the Gododdin (e.g., stanzas 22, 39, 49, 80), the poet vows in stanza 39 to sing *glod heb or, heb eithaf* (praise without bounds, without limit) to Cynon, describing the warrior alternately as *lary fron* (generous-hearted), *dinas* (refuge), *dôr* (protector), *angor byddin* (anchor of an army), and *eiliasaf* (prince). Cynon proves in fact superlative among the many seen by the poet: *O'r sawl a welais ac a welafym mydl Yn umddwyn arf, gryd wryd wriaf* (Of those whom I have seen, and see, in battle,/ Bearing arms, the most valiant in the fight, *Y Gododdin* 39: 396–397). Similar praise singles Cynon out in stanza 65: *Oedd odid ym mid o barth Brythonl Gododdin o bell gwell no Chynon* (Rarely in battle from among the Britons/ Of Gododdin was there one by far better than Cynon, *Y Gododdin* 637–638). The Anglian enemy too marveled at this warrior's preeminence: *Gogyferchi ynnonj Deifr diferogionj A ddyfu o Frython/ Wr well no Chynon,/ Sarff seri alon?* (The tribes of the crafty Deirans/ Were wont to ask/ Did there come from the Brython/ A better man than Cynon,/ A serpent on the enemies' path?, *Y Gododdin* 19: 207–211). While Gwawrddur is no Arthur, praise for Cynon requires no comparison, and it is Cynon rather than the measure of Arthur that dominates the heroism both praised and mourned in *Y Gododdin*. Regardless of attractive conjectures of a vast corpus of oral material about Arthur, surviving Welsh poetry by and large omits him from the praise of military resistance to foreign invaders and neighboring enemies.

BEDE (G 731)

Unfamiliar with the political and religious instability known to Gildas, Bede lived when his own Saxon people were both in control and Christian, when the Anglo-Saxon church was in fact the richest and most learned in Europe (Hanning 63–90). His *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* accordingly lacks both the excoriating assessments of the British and the Anti-Saxon venom of Gildas, identifying the anonymous “blind tyrant” of the earlier work as *rex Vurtigern*, for instance, without the extended diatribe against his treacherous and sinful pact with Saxon beasts (v. I: 68). Similarly, after repeating almost verbatim Gildas' account of the Roman *dux* Ambrosius Aurelianus, Bede then omits condemnation of the generation that secures victory at Mount Badon (v 1 bk I ch 16). Make no mistake: British sin is still

the cause of the fall of Britain. But to the English Bede it is the “converted conquerors” rather than the British who are predestined to inherit the Promised Land of the Chosen.²⁴ Though his work contributes nothing specific to Arthurian tradition, Bede provides an early sympathetic account of the Saxon conquerors and writes the kind of national history of salvation into which Arthur will later be written.

HISTORIA BRITTONUM (C. 830)

Compared to the terse accounts of Gildas and Bede, the ninth-century compilation known as the *Historia Brittonum* offers a much-elaborated version of the coming of the Saxons to Britain. It is also the earliest surviving Latin history to mention Arthur, and provides the first substantial record of his military successes against the Saxons. The collection earned its name around 1150, when it was ascribed to the Welsh cleric Nennius.²⁵ Securely dated to 829–830, the Nennian history survives in thirty-five Latin manuscripts and one translation into Irish. In it, Arthur's military campaigns in chapter 56 culminate a history of British survival and resistance not only to the “harsh” (*durum*) “yoke of Roman law” (*jugum Romania juris* §30) but also to Irish-Pictish aggression (§15)²⁶ and Saxon treachery.²⁷ British contempt for “Roman legates” well precedes Arthur's armed defiance of 56 (*Brittanni ... legationem Romanorum contempserunt* §19). By chapter 28 the British have “overthrown” Roman rule and killed off Roman generals; they no longer paid Roman taxes, “did not accept [Roman] kings to reign over them,” and the Romans kept their distance—“did not dare come to Britain to rule anymore.”²⁸ Yet, despite killing Roman generals on at least three occasions prior to Arthur's campaigns (*Tribus vicibus occisi sunt duces Romanorum a Britannis* §30), control over the island proves precarious, and by the end of chapter 30 the British are once again under the Roman yoke.

Nora Chadwick has maintained that the early ninth century was a time of British secular nationalism (Hanning 94–95), and insistence on British survival in fact marks the entire compilation.²⁹ In the story of St. Germanus, for instance (*HB* §§32–35), the Gaulish holy man creates a new line of Powys kings. In apparently total control of Welsh kingship, the saint destroys a pagan tyrant and ordains a baptized servant in his place:

Juxta verba sancti Germani rex de servo factus est [Catell Durnluc], et omnes filii ejus reges facti sunt, et a semine illorum omnis regio Poviso-rum regitur usque in hodiernum diem. (§35)

According to saint Germanus' words, [Cadell Ddyrnllug] was made a king from a servant, and all his sons were made kings, and from their seed the whole country of Powys is ruled, even to this day.

However orchestrated by outside control, the saint's prophecy of perpetual Welsh rule in Powys foretells lasting native rule rather than foreign

colonization: “Germanus blessed [Cadell], and in addition said ‘From your seed a king shall not fail †for ever†...’” (*Et benedixit ei [Catell], et addidit, et dixit: “Non deficiet rex de semine tuo †in aeternum† ...”* §35).³⁰ And the Germanus tale is not unique. The Arthurian chapter (§56), along with the stories of Ambrosius/ Emrys (§§40–42) and St. Patrick (§§50–55), likewise interrupt not only the history of Saxon Kent (§§31, 36–8, 43–46) but also the genealogies of the Saxon kings of Bernicia (§§57, 61–66), Kent (§§58–59), Mercia (§60), and Deira (§61).³¹ Chapters *de Mirabilibus Britanniae* (on the wonders of Britain, §§67–74), *de Mirabilibus Monae* and *de Mirabilibus Hiberniae* (on the wonders of Mona and Ireland, §75), the *Annales Cambriae* (Welsh Annals), and Welsh genealogies conclude the compilation.³² Thus, though ostensibly a collection of Roman, Irish, and Saxon documents, “heaped” together to offset the lack of British records³³ and chronicling the arrival and subsequent dominance of the Saxons in Britain, the *Historia Brittonum* revels in exceptions to Saxon rule and in its principal theme of future British preeminence.

The future greatness of Britain, however, requires change, and several stories—like the Germanus tale briefly recounted above—chronicle the steady passing of weak native kingship. The story of King Vortigern dominates in this regard, and in twelve chapters the *Historia Brittonum* records much more than his initial pact with the Saxons—notably his betrayal, the hatred of the British for him, and his death by God’s fire (§§45–46, 48, 47). Vortigern’s story begins with the chance arrival of the Saxons (§31). Vortigern might not extend the initial invitation, as recounted by both Gildas and Bede, but his misplaced generosity nonetheless welcomes Horsa and Hengest in the hope of eliciting their forces against the Picts, the Irish, the Romans, and even against Ambrosius, a mysterious figure who turns in this text from the military leader named by Gildas into the powerful seer later known as Merlin:

... dum ipse [Guorthigirnus] regnabat in Britannia, urgebatur a metu Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romano impetu, nee non et a timore Ambrosii. Interea venerunt tres ciulae a Germania expulsae in exilio, in quibus erant Horsa et Hengist.... Guorthigirnus suscepit eos benigne et tradidit eis insulam quae in lingua eorum vocatur Tanet, britannico ser-mone Ruoihm. (§31)

... during [Vortigern’s] rule in Britain he was under pressure, from fear of the Picts and the Irish, and of a Roman invasion, and, not least, from dread of Ambrosius. Then came three keels, driven into exile from Germany. In them were the brothers Horsa and Hengest.... Vortigern welcomed them, and handed over to them the island that in their language is called Thanet, in British Ruoihm.

It is only later that Vortigern receives the promise of Saxon auxiliary forces, in an arrangement that both exposes his weakness and introduces the prophecy of Ambrosius. Additional warriors arrive along with Hengest’s beautiful daughter, and at a banquet Vortigern becomes drunk, lustfully offering up “even half of [his] kingdom” to marry her; the Saxons demand only the land of Kent. Worse than simply welcoming foreigners, Vortigern’s rash act

insinuates them through marriage into both his bloodline and his kingdom: the native ruler of Kent is “secretly” deposed, and Hengest, now father-in-law, becomes the king's advisor (§§37, 38). When Vortigern later “begets a daughter upon his daughter,” he further adulterates British kingship, tainting his rule with incest and bigamy just as he previously relinquished native Kent in exchange for a Saxon bride.³⁴

Yet it is precisely the turmoil ushered in by this exogamous kingship and the literal instability of Vortigern's authority that herald future native strength. Fleeing the Saxons, who have now turned against him and seek his death, Vortigern travels north to the mountains of Eryri (Snowdon) in Gwynedd, where his *magi* advise him to construct a stronghold (§40). But the building materials disappear each night, prompting the wizards to claim that only the sacrificed blood of a fatherless child will secure the foundation and make it possible for the fort to be built (§40). A fatherless boy, found and brought before the king, demonstrates the ignorance of Vortigern's advisor-wizards by uncovering the true cause of the foundation's instability: the foundation rests on a lake containing two vessels with a single tent between them; inside the tent sleep two worms (*duo vermes*), one white and one red; once roused, the worms fight until the red one eventually prevails, driving the white worm from the tent and chasing it across the lake (§42). The boy then explains to Vortigern the *mysterium* of this *mirabile signum*, identifying the lake as the world, the tent as Vortigern's kingdom, the red worm as Vortigern's *draco* (dragon), and the white worm as the dragon of the Saxons.

Different from the Roman *dux* of both Gildas and Bede, military leader who momentarily challenged the Saxon onslaught invited by the “blind tyrant” Vortigern (*De excidio* 25:3; Bede v. I ch. 16), Ambrosius as a powerful interpreter-prophet may stem from a separate native literary tradition. In the *Historia Brittonum*, Ambrosius still boasts Roman descent, but more impressive here are the dynamic contradictions that characterize his mystical foresight: named as both the Roman Ambrosius and the Welsh Emrys,³⁵ he is boy-seer and overlord, *rex fmagnusf inter omnes reges Brittannicae gentis* (the tgreatf king among all the kings of the British nation, §48); dread of kings and son of a virgin; king, king-maker, and prophet of ultimate British victory against the Saxons (§31). Prophet rather than warrior, Ambrosius/ Emrys intervenes directly in the kingship of Vortigern to identify its weakness and promise future national victory. Vortigern himself, failed king that he is, will never be able to fortify Snowdon, *but postea gens nostra surget, etgentem Anglorum trans mare viriliter deiciet* (later our people will arise, and will valiantly throw the English people across the sea, §42).

Arthur remains safely distant from this episode of infamous kingship, and plays no role whatsoever in Vortigern's shameful dealings with foreign mercenaries. Indeed, just as the Ambrosius of Gildas and Bede, or as the standard of excellence in *Y Gododdin*, Arthur in the *Historia* is a warrior *dux* rather than *rex*. As *dux bellorum* he leads and proves victorious in twelve

campaigns against the Saxons— *in omnibus bellis victor extitit* (§56) —commanding the kings of Britain in their effort to reclaim Kent: *Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos [reges Cantorum] in Mis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sedipse dux erat bellorum* (Then Arthur fought against [the kings of the Kentishmen] in those days, together with the kings of the British; but he was their leader in battle, §56). In the twelfth battle of Mount Badon, Arthur's one-man assault slays nine hundred and sixty men, single-handedly routing the enemy: *Duodecimumfuit bellum in monte Badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die nongenti sexaginta viri de uno impetu Arthur; et nemo prostravit eos nisi ipsi solus ...* (The twelfth battle was on Badon Hill and in it nine hundred and sixty men fell in one day, from a single charge of Arthur's ..., §56). Very different from the failed and treasonous kingship of Vortigern, the catalogue of Arthur's campaigns in §56 proves exemplary of native efforts to stem the increasing flow of Anglo-Saxons into Britain. Written at a time of secure Saxon domination over Britain, the *Historia Brittonum* insists that the British will eventually prevail over their invaders, and Arthur is named for the first time in Latin as the military agent of prophesied British victory.

Moreover, Arthur's secular-political leadership as *dux* proves to be ultimately spiritual and Christian, inserting religiosity and tacit moral integrity into what were the darkest days of Gildas' *De excidio*. The *Historia* substantiates Arthur's military prowess with Christian heroism, attributing his eighth victory to the direct intervention of both the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ:

Octavum fuit bellum in castello Guinnion, in quo Arthur portavit imaginem sanctae Mariae perpetuae virginis super humeros suos, et pagani versi sunt in fugam in illo die, et caedes magna fuit super illos per virtutem Domini nostri Jesu Christi et per virtutem sanctae Mariae virginis genitricis ejus. (§56)

The eighth battle was in Guinnion fort, and in it Arthur carried the image of the holy Mary, the everlasting Virgin, on his [shield,] and the heathen were put to flight on that day, and there was a great slaughter upon them, through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the holy Virgin Mary, his mother. (Square brackets in Morris' edition)

With this kind of secular hagiography the *Historia Brittonum* remodels and restores the anonymous generation chided so severely by Gildas, a generation whose sinfulness and moral degeneration cast a pall over the sixth-century descendants of Ambrosius Aurelianus. Such revisionism, such marked departure from the tradition of Gildas and Bede, rewrites earlier versions of the *excidium* of Britain, not only providing the earliest reference in Latin to Arthur, but identifying an Arthur *cum* soldier of Christ and a period of successful military command graced by divine protection and favor.

In addition to cataloguing Arthur's tenure as successful military leader, the *Historia Brittonum* includes details about Arthur in the “wonders of Britain” that conclude the compilation (§§67–74). Among the *mirabiles*

(§73), a stone in the northern region of Builth bears the imprint of Arthur's hunting dog Cafal (horse). Arthur himself built a heap of stones underneath it, and the pile has since been called Cam Cafal (Cafal's cairn). The wonder of the imprinted stone is that, though someone remove it, the next day it will again be found on top of the pile.³⁶

In the southeast border region of Eryng can be found a tomb that never measures the same size twice—a wonder attested by the compiler, who claims to have tried it himself (*ego solus probavi*, §73). The tomb is that Amr. *filius Arthuri militis erat, et ipse occidit eum ibidem et sepelivit* (He was the son of the warrior Arthur, and he killed him there and buried him, §73). Arthur's infanticide certainly adds complexity to the figure of the warrior, and as in the case of the tale of Ambrosius/ Emrys it suggests a larger circulating corpus of Arthurian tales that have failed to survive in written form. These two Arthurian wonders span the length of Wales, associating the warrior with the north and the southeast. The *Historia Brittonum* is the most substantial pre-Galfridian description of Arthur as a military leader against the Saxons, and, as attested by the lore of his dogs cairn and his sons grave, he is already a figure of legend. Excluding stanza 99 of *Y Gododdin*, no such written depiction exists in Welsh.

ANNALES CAMBRIAE (C. 950)

The oldest chronicle of Welsh affairs, the tenth-century *Annales Cambriae* survives in three recensions, the earliest of which exists as a final insertion into the *Historia Brittonum* of Harleian MS 3859.³⁷ Events in the lives of saints dominate the early entries, yet for the year 516 the *Annales* records the battle of Badon, in which Arthur led the Britons to victory after carrying on his shoulders (or on his shield) “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights” (*an. Bellum Badonis, in quo Arthurportavit crucem Domini nostri Jhesu Christi tribus diebus et tribus noctibus in humeros suos et Brittones victores fuerunt*, HB pp 45, 85).³⁸ Successive lines record St. Brigid's birth (an. 454), the death of St. Patrick (an. 457), St. David's birth (an. 458), and the deaths of Bishop Benignus (an. 468) and Bishop Ebur (an. 501). Two Arthurian entries round out the first ten, separated by the record, for the year 521, of both the birth and St. Columba and the death of St. Brigid. Arthur's victory, following as it does a three-day association with the Cross of Jesus Christ, and his fall round out the first ten entries of the *Annales* and group Arthur within the holy ranks of Bridig, Patrick, David, and Columba—among the patron saints of Ireland and Wales. Very much a military saint here, the Arthur of the *Annales* combines both the figure of legendary “wonder” from the *mirabilae* and the unbeaten crusader against the Saxons of the HB. Arthur's death is recorded in the year 537—*an. Gueith Camlann*—when he fell with Medraut at the Battle of Camlann, after which *mortalitas in Britannia et in Hibernia fuit* (there was plague in Britain and Ireland, pp 85, 45). Little enigma surrounds this fall, and the resulting plague in Britain and

Ireland punctuates the event as far-reaching and catastrophic.

ARMES PRYDEIN (C. 950)

Unlike *Y Gododdin*, the poem *Armes Prydein* (The Prophecy of Britain) is considered “securely datable” to the political context of southern Wales in the tenth century.³⁹ The first of many political prophesies in Welsh verse, *Armes* foretells vengeance and final victory for *y Kymry* (the Welsh) over the oppressive taxation of Athelstan, the West Saxon *mechteyrn* (overlord) and his *meiryon* (stewards) (*Armes* xx). In what Sir Ifor Williams has termed a voice of “nationalist opposition” (*Armes* xxvi), the poet refers to *y Kymry* fourteen times in just under two hundred lines, inciting them to drive the foreigners into exile and to pay their taxes in Saxon blood. In the opening lines the poet promises property, peace, and wide dominion, prophesizing the coming of *deu diarchar barawt* (two unconquerable leaders), Cynan and Cadwaladr: *deu vnben degyn dwys eu kussyl* (two overpowering lords of profound counsel), *deu orsegyn Saesson* (two conquerors of the Saxons), *deu erchwynawc Prydein* (two fearless defenders of Britain) (*Armes* ll 165–69). Cynan and Cadwaladr will lead a pan-Celtic alliance of Welsh, Dublin Vikings, Irish, Cornish, Scottish, and Bretons to expel the West Saxons from Britain: *Efdialawry treth argwerth beunydy/ar mynych gennadeu argeu luyd./ ... Saesson o pop parth y gwarth ae deubyd./ ry treghis eu hoes nys dioes eluyd* (The tribute and the daily payments will be avenged—/ and the frequent expeditions and the wicked hosts./ ... Shame will befall the Saxons on all sides:/ their time has passed, they have no country, ll 123–24, 155–56). In the end *dygorfu Kymry* (the Welsh will prevail, 125, 127), and *gwyn eu byt wy Gymry* (happy will be the Welsh, 97)—so does this short, vehement poem insist on the Welsh people as a unified whole in need of deliverance from oppressive foreign overlordship, precisely the need later fulfilled by King Arthur in the *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. So familiar is Geoffrey's version of Arthur, in fact, that it is in just such a text as *Armes Prydein* that we expect to find him. But here, in the earliest exemplar of Welsh vaticinatory poetry—written a century after the *Historia Brittonum* and roughly contemporaneous with the *Annates Cambriæ*—Arthur remains notably absent from vernacular prophesies of future peace, prosperity, and expulsion of the Anglo-Saxons from Wales. A sense of Britain, sure; but also a sense of Wales and the Welsh as distinct from and resistant to Anglo-Saxon dominion exists before that of a single sovereign Welsh ruler.

EARLY WELSH POETRY (C. 800–1100)

The Welsh poetry preserved in the Books of Aneirin and Taliesin—both surviving as parts of large-scale compilation manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries⁴⁰—has been largely and problematically dated by lexical analysis. Though wary of offering precise dates, most scholars confidently

place these poems in the period prior to the twelfth century.

Englynion y Beddau (Stanzas of the Graves) (c. 800–1000)

The Black Book of Carmarthen contains seventy-three elegiac stanzas of three or more lines.⁴¹ Known collectively as *Englynion y Beddau* (Stanzas of the Graves), they record the burial places of early Welsh heroes, many of whom are known or recognized from various sources, including Adomnán of Iona's late seventh-century Latin *Life of Saint Columba*, native Welsh prose narratives, Welsh elegiac poetry, and the *Historia Brittonum*⁴²—making startlingly clear the existence of what Thomas Jones describes as a “great corpus” of heroic tales, a “wealth of traditions current in pre-Norman Wales” (“Stanzas” 116).⁴³

A single yet significant line names Arthur, and it provides the only evidence in medieval Welsh of a belief in Arthur's immortality and possible return.⁴⁴ *Anoeth bid bety Arthur* (most difficult in the world to find is a grave for Arthur).⁴⁵ Scant evidence indeed, especially in light of pre-Galfridian historiographical accounts of such a belief flourishing among the continental Bretons rather than in Britain. Though even a single reference indicates a certain popular familiarity, relying as it does upon an established heroic reputation, Arthur here remains one of eighty-seven named heroes, part of a vast retinue of which he was by no means the preeminent object of literary praise. In fact, as already established by the nearly complete lack of Arthurian references in the *Armes Prydein* and in the praise poetry of Aneirin and Taliesin, Arthur here also receives significantly less attention than other Welsh heroes.⁴⁶ The notable singularity of Arthur's grave, however, separates him from the band of other heroes named in the *Englynion*, elevating him above death with a grave all but impossible to find.

Four Arthurian Poems (c. 900–1100)

Gereintfilius Erbin (Gereint son of Erbin), *Mi a Wum* (I have been), *Pa Gur* (what man), and *Preiddeu Annwfn* (the spoils of the Otherworld): these four poems have been analyzed in detail elsewhere.⁴⁷ I want here to focus on their importance in presenting the earliest strains of a negative Arthurian tradition in Welsh—a subtle precursor to *Culhwch ac Olwen*'s irony, first hints of a Welsh trend that will later be absorbed by and exaggerated in Latin hagiography.

In two juxtaposed stanzas of *Gereintfilius Erbin* (Gereint son of Erbin), the military forces of the “emperor” Arthur⁴⁸ and of Gereint are decimated in battle. The stanzas imply that though the two armies are slain the leaders survive, and ambiguity allows for the interpretation that Arthur and Gereint are opposed in battle rather than allied:

En llogporth y gueleise. y Arthur
guir. a guyar in dinev.
agvydi gaur garv atnev.

En llogporth y lias y gereint.
guir. deur o odir diwneint.
a chin rillethid va.11atysseint. (Coe and Young 118)

At Llongborth I saw Arthur's
Brave men, they hewed with steel,
The emperor, ruler of battle-toil.
At Llongborth were killed Gereint's
Brave men from the lowlands of Devon,
But before they were slain, they slew. (Bollard, "Arthur" 17)⁴⁹

These stanzas can thus provocatively suggest a tradition of violent conflict and rivalry between Arthur and the southwest hero later incorporated into the penumbra of his fame.

In the *Mi a Wum* (I have been) poem associated with a dialogue between Gwyddneu Garanhir and Gwyn ap Nudd,⁵⁰ an obscure but provocative stanza makes reference to the warrior death of Arthur's son:

Mi a wum lle llas llachev.
Mab Arthur uthir ig kerteu.
Ban ryreint brein ar crev. (Coe and Young 124)

I have been where Llachau was slain
The son of Arthur, terrifying/ awful in songs
When ravens croaked over blood. (Jarman, "Arthurian Allusions" 107)

Oliver Padel translates the epithet *uthir ig kerteu* as "awesome" or "terrifying," and though its precise referent is ambiguous—it can modify either Arthur or Llachau—the immediate juxtaposition in line two of *Arthur* and *uthir* is strikingly redolent of Geoffrey's later identification of Arthur's father as Uther (Padel, *AMWL* 51). Coe and Young, however, offer the slightly different translation of "awful in songs," emphasizing the negative range of *uthir* and thus raising the intriguing possibility of a tradition satirizing Arthur as the object of bad or awful songs.

In *Pa Gur* (what man),⁵¹ Arthur and Cai the Fair, together with the "best men in the world" seek entrance to the fort guarded by the porter Glewlwyd Mighty-Grasp.⁵² Rather than the famous center of narrative action, Arthur's warband is unknown and unwelcome by the porter, who remains unimpressed despite the lengthy list of warrior-followers that Arthur provides as proof of both his nobility and eligibility to enter. *Pa Gur* in this way offers a "comic reversal" of the warrior list so deliberately lengthened in *Culhwch ac Olwen* to emphasize Arthur's fame (B. F. Roberts, "*Culhwch*" 78).

Preiddeu Anntufin (the spoils of the Otherworld),⁵³ narrated by the boastful voice of the mythical Taliesin, recalls with solemnity Arthur's disastrous expedition to the Otherworld, from which only seven men returned of three shiploads. This poem of loss represents the only significant reference to Arthur in the Taliesin corpus; and rather than Arthur, its unifying personality is Taliesin himself, more intent in this instance on offering a

diatribe against contemporary monks than a lament for past Arthurian glory (Haycock). Thus do these four poems suggest a body of lore beyond praise literature, in which Arthur is alternately the object of comedy, satire, and lament.

***CULHWCH AC OLWEN* (C. 1100)⁵⁴**

The work of a rhetorical “virtuoso,”⁵⁵ *Culhwch ac Olwen* stands out in medieval Welsh literature as a “mine of legal idioms” and a “repository” of untold references to Celtic lore (Ford 119). *Culhwch* also bears the distinction of being the longest and most developed extant pre-Galfridian portrait of Arthur; more a tale about Arthur and his preeminence than about the eponymous hero's quest, *Culhwch* represents a structural inversion of the Arthurian romances to be discussed below in [Part III](#).

Unique among other medieval British tales, *Culhwch* develops to a striking extent a connection between kingship and the possession of hair-trimming tools. In this tale we meet Arthur as a paradigm of generosity and warrior prowess. He is also the king with the comb and shears, and in a tale largely obsessed with kingship and framed by references to barbing,⁵⁶ possession of such tools attests to Arthur's preeminence among his rivals. To be sure, the slap-stick, burlesque aspect of this tale complicates its portrait of strong Arthurian kingship. With regard to what she calls its “pervasive emphasis on grooming,” Joan Radner labels the tale “the world's first tonsorial mock-up (taking *The Rape of the Lock* as a second)” (52). Radner's article on irony is one of the sharpest assessments of this tale, persuasive in its suggestion that a “primary purpose” of *Culhwch* as a whole may indeed aim at playful irony, funhouse-mirror distortion, and mock-up. Yet a force beneath the laughs seems intent on foregrounding the violent strength of Arthur's British kingship. Barbing is power in this tale, and the grooming theme insistently links Arthur's kingship to his hair-trimming treasures, the tools by which he carves out and expands his realm.

Arthur is described in this tale as *Penn Teyrned yr Ynys honn* (Chief of the Princes of this Island,” 142–3), and he rules over a court of famous, sought-after, and semi-divine warriors. Often labeled a “wooing tale,” *Culhwch ac Olwen* traces how the noble hero “wins” his bride from her overprotective father Ysbaddaden Pencawr (Chief Giant); the tale moves outward from Arthur's court, to Ysbaddaden's, and on to a wider Britain beyond both before duly culminating with the wedding of the title couple. Yet, *Culhwch* plays a relatively minor role: after demanding a hair-cut from his cousin Arthur, requisitioning the talent of Arthur's warband, and tagging along on the initial quest for his bride-to-be, he disappears entirely from the arduous action of the narrative. *Culhwch* speaks, threatens, and demands a lot in the first part of the tale, and he listens well to Ysbaddaden's relentless list of 39 *anoethau* (impossible tasks); but when it comes to the actual doing, narrative focus turns to the exploits of Arthur and his super-human warband. Boasting

about the ease with which the *anoethau* will be accomplished by others, Culhwch accepts the giant's terms in Arthur's name: "*A'm harghwyd gar Arthur a geiff imi hynny oll. A'th verch titheu a gaffaf ui, a'th eneit a golly titheu*" 753–55 (and my noble kinsman Arthur will get me all those things; and I will win your daughter, and you will lose your life, Ford 144). He himself does not participate in fulfilling any of the *anoethau* set by Ysbaddaden as his pre-nuptial requirements, and he remains absent during Arthur's climactic hunt for the razor, comb, and shears needed for Ysbaddaden's wedding shave. When Culhwch reappears in the final lines of the tale to claim his bride from the freshly-shaved Chief Giant, Ysbaddaden reminds him that it is only thanks to Arthur that Olwen is now his. Consider the final passage in its entirety:

Ac yna y kychwynnwys ... sawl a buchei drwc y Yspadaden Pennkawr ... hyt y lys. A dyvot Kaw o Brydein y eillaw y uaryf, kic a chroen hyt asgwrn, a'r deu glust yn llwyr. Ac y dywawt Kulhwch, "A eillvvyt itti, wr?" "Eillwyt," heb ynteu. Ae meu y minheu dy uerch di weithon?" "Meu," heb ynteu. "Ac nyt reit itt diolwch y mi hynny, namyn diolwch y Arthur y gwr a'e penis itt. O'm bod i nys kaffut ti hi vyth. A'm heneit inheu ymadws yw y diot." Ac yna yd ymauaelawd Goreu mab Custennin yndaw herwyd gwallt y penn, a'e luscaw yn y of y'r dom, a llad y penn a'e dodi ar bawl y gatlys. A goresgyn y gaer a oruc a'e gyuoeth. A'r nos honno y kyscwys Kulhwch gan Olwen.... Ac uelly y kauas Kulhwch Olwen merch Yspadaden Pennkawr. (1230–46)

And then ... everyone that wished ill to Ysbaddaden Chief Giant [set out for] his court. Caw [Protector] of Prydein came to shave his beard— his flesh and skin down to the bone, and his two ears. And Culhwch asked, "Have you had your shave, man?" "I have," he replied. "And is your daughter mine now?" "She is," he said, "but don't thank me for that, thank Arthur who secured her for you. Of my own free will you would never have had her. And it is high time to take my life." So then Goreu [the Best] son of Custennin seized him by the hair of his head, dragged him to the mound, cut off his head and stuck it on the courtyard post. Culhwch took possession of his fort and his kingdom, and that night slept with Olwen.... Thus did Culhwch win Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant. (J & J 113; Ford 157)

The structure of this culminating moment is representative of Culhwch's role in the tale: Culhwch talks, Arthur's men act around him. Sandwiching Culhwch's taunt of line 1234 ("have you had your shave, man?"), first Caw (Guardian) of Britain shaves beard, skin, and ears from the Giant, then Goreu (the Best) son of Custennin cuts off his head and displays it, mutilated, as the visible, tangible proof of the "ill will" "wished" on him by Arthur's kin. "Thus," we're told ironically, "did Culhwch win Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant."

Clearly, *Culhwch ac Olwen* is not primarily about the hero or even about the title couple; the tale rather highlights the preeminence of Arthur and his warrior band and celebrates their giant slaying (and the witch slaying and boar slaying that lead up to their giant slaying), sustaining what Bromwich and Evans have termed "Arthur's exalted reputation as the greatest of [Britain's]

Giant Killers” (liv). Bromwich and Evans in fact read *Culhwch ac Olwen* as a defense-of-Britain tale, because, in their words, it “depict[s] Arthur and his band of men as the defenders of their land against Giants and other *gormesoedd* [plagues], whether enemy invaders or hostile monsters” (liv).⁵⁷

A problem with reading *Culhwch* as a defense-of-Britain tale is that the slaying is not entirely defensive; it is instigated by Culhwch's threatening demands for a particular wife and kingdom. More appropriate might be to consider this an-awesome-display-of-British-kingship tale, in which the mightiest king prevails. Arthur's court and kingship set the standard, as does the kinship behavior (both the wooing and the conquests) that is sanctioned and carried out by him. So even though Arthur defines the nobility of his court in terms of its generosity,

“Ydym wyrda hyt tra yn dygyrcher. Yd ytuo mwyhaf y kyuarws a rothom, mwyuwy uyd yn gwrdaeth ninheu ac an cret ac an hetmic.” (136–38)

We are nobles as long as anyone seeks us out; the greater favor we bestow, the greater shall be our nobility, our fame, and our honor. (Ford 125)

even so, terror and the threat of force as much as Arthur's generous favor gets the tale underway: the partum madness of Culhwch's mother (5–8; Ford 121), his father's usurpation of neighbor's life, wife, and land (30–33; Ford 122), his step-mother's curse (50–1; Ford 123), and his own remarkably violent threats (103–10, 154–55; Ford 124, 125) lead up to and impel Arthur's role in the tale's larger plot. Culhwch promises to “satirize” Arthur (*mi a dygaf anglot y'th arglwyd*, 103); he also threatens to *dodi teir diaspat* (to raise up three screeches, 104–5) that will cause the pregnant women of the court to abort (*methawd eu beichogi*, 108; their pregnancies will fail) and the wombs of the not-yet-pregnant to be “consigned to [perpetual] sterility,” Ford 124 (*yn vrthtrwm arnadunt mal na buynt ueichawc byth o hediw allan*, 109–10). Culhwch thus redirects the violence of his stepmother's curse against Arthur's court, forcing his cousin's hand. The ostensive goal of “wooing” Olwen is ultimately the usurpation of Ysbaddaden's dominion, and the take-over involves a family aggression that renders Arthur's kin and his kingship analogous to the alternatives we encounter beyond his court—as analogous to Twrch Trwyth's punished power as to the parody of such power embodied by Ysbaddaden Pencawr. There is no great distinction in *Culhwch ac Olwen* between Arthur and his kin, the Boar-king, and the Chief Giant; Arthur simply proves to be the mightiest of the British kings vying for control of the Island.

The tale's obsession with hair is telling in this regard, as if Arthur's kingship is defined in part by his power to trim, comb, and raze hair. His possession of grooming tools seems vital to distinguishing his own power and domain from that of his rivals. Following the hair-cut through which Arthur admits Culhwch into his court and kin-group, the overall plot aims to shave the Chief Giant both literally and figuratively of his daughter and his realm. Along the way, Ysgithrwyn Chief Boar is slaughtered so that his tusk might

serve as a razor (task 15);⁵⁸ Dillus Farfawg (Dillus the Bearded), another Giant, gets his beard fatally plucked by Cei (task 30/31);⁵⁹ and the Boar King, Twrch Trwyth, has stolen from him the razor, shears, and comb he keeps behind his ears, those “treasures” that resemble the gold comb and silver-handled shears with which Arthur initially trims Culhwch (task 21).⁶⁰ To call it a “wooing tale” is thus to use too general and tame a descriptive: *Culhwch ac Olwen* is about British kingship, about who among Britain's various powerful leaders has the comb—who trims, plucks, barbs and razes the hair of others—and it is also about who gets to grow and keep a beard. And here, before the twelfth-century appearance of romance, that British leader is Arthur. In many ways, *Culhwch* is a maturation tale of conquest, usurpation, and territorial acquisition, one in which Arthur's warband un-combs a Boar King, shaves a Giant King, and ultimately advances to power an as-yet-beardless youth of Arthur's kin. The very purpose of Arthur's court seems to be the generous fulfillment of quests just such as Culhwch's, and the ritual hair-cutting that recognizes a blood tie incorporates into Arthur's warband not only his young cousin but also his young cousin's curse and quest for bride and land.

The ironic humor of *Culhwch ac Olwen* serves to alleviate somewhat the Arthurian show of force that makes up the tale. Consider Arthur's boundless generosity, extended to Culhwch only to be immediately qualified by a fairly extensive list of material exceptions. Arthur promises to give Culhwch whatever

“a notto dy benn a'th tauawd, hyt y sych gwynt, hyt y gwlych glaw, hyt yr etil heul, hyt yd ymgyffret mor, hyt yd ydiw dayar, *eithyr* uy llong a'm llen, a Chaletuwch uyg cledyf, a Rongomynyat uyg gwayw, ac Vyneb Gwrthucher uy yscwyrt, a Charnwenhan uyg kyllell, a Gwenhvyuar uyg gwreic.” (156–62, italics added)

your head and tongue may claim, as long as the wind dries, the rain wets, the sun moves, as far as land and sea reach—except, my ship and my mantle, Caledfwlch my sword, Rhongomiant my spear, Wynebgwrthucher my shield, Carnwennan my knife, and Gwenhwyfar my wife. (Ford 126, italics added)

Arthur then concludes this list with an emphatic reiteration of his liberal-handedness: “*Gwir Dwy ar hynny. Ti a'e keffy yn llawen. Not a nottyach,*” 162–3 (God's truth on it: you shall have [whatever you claim] gladly: demand what you will, Ford 126).

Similar laughs are had at the expense of Ysbaddaden and his court, “the most splendid [fort] in the world,” Ford 133 (*mwylhaf ar keyryt y byt*, 413), where the Giant king displays gratuitous inhospitality that provides a farcical alternative to the magnanimous nobility of Arthur's court. Kingship is itself bloated and inoperable in Ysbaddaden's fort—the giant cannot see unless his corpulent eyelids are propped up by forks. His exercise of power is equally perverse, though here benign, prompting phrases from Radner such as “custard-pie humour,” and masterfully “heavy-handed comic understatement”

(51): Ysbaddaden bids farewell to his guests by hurling poisoned spears at them; the spears are caught and hurled back, piercing the giant straight through his knee-cap, his breast, and his eyeball. Ysbaddaden curses his “damned and barbarous son-in-law” as well as the arthritic knee, the asthma, the chronic indigestion, and the weepy eye that will likely result from his wounds (521–58; Ford 136–7). Ysbaddaden's court provides a ridiculously warped, fun-house-mirror reflection of Arthur's court, and the comedy exploits the giant's size to hit home the gross excess of his rule. He is clearly as big in the uncouth as he is swollen in the flesh, such that grave spear wounds are only irritating insect bites, and his grotesque fleshiness embodies a similarly excessive brand of court custom. The laughs here and elsewhere in the tale warp comparisons between courts and kings, and the comedic tone offsets the more forceful, more lethal side of British sovereignty.

From the outset of this tale in fact we are made familiar with an accepted norm of fluid jurisdiction. Cilydd son of Celyddon Wledig, father of our young hero, “takes counsel [about] where he might find” himself a new wife (Ford 122), and a counselor recommends what he deems to be a suitable marriage—to “the wife of King Doged” (Ford 122). In a very terse sequence that prefigures Culhwch's own extended wooing quest for Olwen, Cilydd and his men decide euphemistically “to seek” King Doged's wife, and we're told that “they [kill] the king and [carry] his wife back home with them.... Then they [take] possession of the king's land” (Ford 122): *Kyghor uu ganthunt y chyrchu. A llad y brenhin a dwyn y wreic atref ganthu a orugant ac un uerch a oed idi gyd a hi. A gwereskyn tir y brenhin a wnaethant* (31–33).

Such marriage violence rebounds onto Culhwch in the form of his stepmother's “curse,” but it also earns the sanction and sponsorship of Arthur and his warband. The curse—that Culhwch shall “never have a wife until [he] get[s] Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief-giant” (Ford 123); *tyghaf tyghet it na lath[of] dy ystlys vrth wreic hyt pan geffich Olwen merch Yspadaden Penkawr* (50–51)—is a death sentence. The giant can only live so long as his daughter remains unmarried (503–4; Ford 135), and so he does his utmost to kill all prospective sons-in-law. Even so, as in the case of his father's second marriage, Culhwch too ends up with the land as well as the girl: in the final lines of the tale we hear how the successful hero *a goresgyn y gaer a oruc a'e gyuoeth. A'r nos honno y kyscwys Kulhwch gan Olwen*, 1241–42 (took possession of [Ysbaddaden's] fort and his kingdom, and that night Culhwch slept with Olwen, Ford 157). The tale as a whole, in other words, with its epic giant-killing, sanctions Arthur's war against Ysbaddaden for the conquest of both his daughter and his territory. Integral to Culhwch's take-over is both the lethal shave of Ysbaddaden and the collection of what can only be symbols of kingship from the boar-king Twrch Trwyth, son of Taredd Wledig: the shears, comb, and razor that rest between his ears.

If Ysbaddaden's Jabba-the-Hut excess provides a lightly humorous, parodic double of Arthur's court, the hunt for the hair-trimming “treasures” of

the Twrch Trwyth equate Arthur's kingship with superior might and with the destruction of a "sinful" rival. Nearly half of Ysbaddaden's task list touches on the hunt, and the event claims a full four pages of Ford's translation, a lengthy narrative attention to Arthur's pursuit through Ireland, Wales, Devon, and Cornwall. Arthur and his forces "completely" "drive off" "the hosts of Ireland," and his presence causes *ouyn mawr ac ergryn racdaw yn Iwerdon*, mighty fear and terror in Ireland, so much so that the Irish saints seek Arthur's *nawd*, his protection, and the men of Ireland offer him tribute (1061–65; Ford 153). The devastation of the hunt is emphasized here by the proliferation of place-names. In a tale otherwise ambiguous in geography the hunt of the Twrch Trwyth proves replete with detail, particularly as the chase wreaks havoc throughout Wales. Twrch Trwyth, now sole survivor of his line, is himself finally "ambushed" and "drive [n] by sheer force into the Severn" (Ford 156; 1174–76). "Arthur and the champions of Britain fall upon him." "Moving in for the kill," they "seize him by the feet," and "dunk him in the Severn until he is submerged" (1179–84); one warrior rushes from one side and "snatches the razor [*yr ellyn*]," rushing from the other side another "carries off the shears [*y gwelleu*]" (1184–87). But Twrch Trwyth manages to protect his comb (*crib*), and he escapes into Cornwall to wreak even greater *drwg*, misery, than he had before in Wales:

O drwc y gilyd y kaffat y grib y gantaw. Ac odyna y holet ynteu o Gernyw, ac y gyrrwynt y'r mor yn y gyueir. Ny wybuwynt vyth o hynny allan pa le yd aeth.... (1199–1202)

From misery to misery the comb was taken from him. Thereupon Twrch Trwyth was chased out of Cornwall, driven into the sea, and no one ever knew after that where he went.... (Ford 156)

Fairly detailed chronicling of the destruction of territory and the slaughter of men as well as the eradication of an entire royal family of boar-king and seven piglets—not in the defense of Britain, but in an effort to wrest from the Boar-king hair-trimming "treasures" with which to shave the Giant-king. When Arthur finally explains that Twrch Trwyth *brenhin uu, ac am y bechawt y rithwys Duw efyn hwch*, 1075–7 ([he] had been a king, [until] God changed him [and his sons] into swine for his sins, Ford 153), the tale indirectly posits Arthur's just right to hunt so destructively. Both Arthur and his kingroup are conspicuously human, distinct from their rivals; that Ysbaddaden and Twrch Trwyth are respectively giant and beast—and thus slayable—emphasizes that the marriage claims and territorial acquisitions of Arthur's kin are wholly proper.

The formula for successful kingship in *Culhwch ac Olwen* entails an epic kind of territorial conquest, here the wresting away of jurisdiction and the wielding of power over rivals imagined as grotesque or animal. Arthur and his kin emerge triumphant, actively engaged in staking out the realm, preeminent giant slayers as yet uncompromised by the negative king-portraits of romance.

The medieval notion of history accommodated a wide range of literary forms, including both Latin saints' lives and vernacular court poetry.⁶¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth praised Walter Archdeacon of Oxford for his learning in *muftis historiis* (in all branches of history),⁶² and though in the final decades of the twelfth century Gervase of Canterbury identified only three types of historical works—annals, chronicles, and histories—contemporary usage of the word *historia* proved to be much more inclusive. Thus both Geoffrey's *Historia* and the earlier twelfth-century corpus of British-Latin saints' lives share a generic title with the “structural hodgepodge” of both secular and religious history and fiction that Jean Leclercq has termed “monastic historiography” (Leclercq 159).

Like the exaggerated gloom of Gildas, Bede's miracles, or the prophecies of Ambrosius-Emrys in the Nennian history, saints' lives were miraculous fabrications, fictions of a specific kind, *legenda* strategically altered to edify, promote veneration, and inspire imitation (Leclercq 161–2). So when Sulpicius Severus wrote in the fifth century that he would have remained silent “rather than utter falsehoods,” or when he concluded his *Life of Saint Martin* with the warning that “if anyone reads [the *Life*] skeptically he will be sinning” (Noble and Head 5, 29), he claimed recourse to a truth that combined *historia* with “the wonder cult” of spiritual veneration and edification.⁶³ With miraculous powers common to many saints Martin resurrected the dead, controlled fire, communed with angels, healed *in absentia*, and remained impervious to the devil's illusions. Yet Sulpicius denied writing *fabula*: “I had the story,” he claims, “just as I have told it, from Martin's own lips” (Noble and Head 26). The trope of truth proved to be as much a mainstay of hagiography as of historiography, romance, or of medieval literature in general, and claims to incontrovertible sources were an authorial reflex shared as much by singer-poets as by the writers of secular and ecclesiastical *historia*.⁶⁴

A handful of pre-Galfridian *vitae* of Welsh and Breton saints explode the above subtle, suggestive implications into wholesale anti-Arthurian material, and as such they represent a tradition notably at odds with the Latin chronicle accounts and with much of the vernacular Welsh literature discussed so far.⁶⁵ The frequency with which Arthur appears as a British-Welsh *rex* shows that his fame had developed within a clerical milieu since the terse account of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*—the images of a battle-tested, Christian Arthur and his wondrous regional fame that present the most likely source for the saints' lives. Unique to the *vitae*, however, is the negative transformation of Arthur's military fame into belligerence, his Christian leadership now marked by moral and spiritual iniquity, his previous association with the Virgin Mary replaced by carnal lust and a rapacious appetite for material wealth.⁶⁶ Arthur is indeed first promoted to the status of *rex* in this corpus—he is recognized as *magnus Arturus Britonum rex* (Coe and Young 36–7), *rex*

tonus maioris Britanniae,⁶⁷ *rex illustrissimi Britannie* (*Cadocus* §22)—but such epithets are as frequently modified by a negative: Arthur is *rex rebellis*, *Arturus tyrannus* (*Gildas* §§5, 10), *quidam tirannus Arthur nomine* (*Paternus* §21), phrases that associate him more closely with *predones infausti* than with respected royal power.⁶⁸ The *vitae* in this way both revise and build on earlier accounts of Arthur, diminishing his *HB* role as both moral and martial national redeemer in favor of local saints, and exploiting negative strains of popular legend to vie for power with contemporary secular authority.

Making King Arthur grossly unworthy of the Virgin Marys divine patronage (as bestowed in the *HB*), the “monastic history” of the *vitae* thus makes room for a new brand of hero. As noble, generous, even military protectors, the saints in this corpus share many of the characteristics of their epic counterparts; but as soldiers of Christ they boast the additional spiritual purity and legitimacy of Gods elect. In addition to King Arthur, historical warrior-rulers such as Maelgwn Gwynedd and Meirchion and Caradog of Deheubarth provide clerical writers with the perfect competitive foil, and the *vitae* routinely invert the qualities and motivations of secular military authority as a means of establishing both the primacy of saints and their territorial jurisdiction.

Despite a seemingly direct, adversarial, and competitive engagement with contemporary *historia*, the negative Arthurian tradition of the British Latin saints' lives has often been ignored if not dismissed by scholars. Stephen Knight for one has understood that the *vitae* were largely unknown outside ecclesiastical circles, that they were limited in scope to a narrow agenda of church propaganda, and thus negligible in influence on Arthurian tradition (*ALS* 3). The relative inaccessibility of these texts to modern readers perpetuates such bias: largely omitted from both hagiographie and Arthurian anthologies and difficult to locate either unabridged or in translation, the *vitae* remain generally unknown.⁶⁹ This despite overriding themes of warfare and proper rule that align the saint's lives with the concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, a Latin work whose immense influence on medieval literature in general and Arthurian tradition in particular continues to be recognized.⁷⁰

Positing mutually exclusive literary and social worlds, Knight's assumption leaves no room for the overlap between monastic and courtly communities—an overlap that this chapter hopes to make readily discernible. Such overlap, far from narrowing the field of influence, instead encompasses an otherwise disparate body of Welsh and Latin sources, revealing the impressive degree of exchange and mutual awareness that conjoins them. The *vitae* surely in part aim to secure church interests by tarnishing the authority of secular rivals—rivals made familiar not only through Latin *historia* but through the vernacular poetry and court panegyric sung by *praecones* of the type so despised as parasitic by the sixth-century Gildas. True enough, the *vitae* may not yet represent a hybrid community of laicized clerics and

clericalized professional poets of the type described by Ad Putter (“Knights and Clerics”) and (less explicitly) by Sarah Kay.⁷¹ In fact, there is very little harmonious confluence of the secular heroic and saintly monastic; a serious competition for authority instead animates these *vitae*. Without implying that Arthur in any way dominates these saints’ lives, and without intending to diminish their force as religious texts, I would like to suggest their fundamental role in shaping the development of Arthurian tradition, of eliciting a direct response from Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Historia* picked up with gusto the proverbial Arthurian gauntlet thrown down by a wholly negative portrait of Welsh secular authority. Geoffreys much embellished biography of King Arthur, made warrior and saint both, not only answered but ultimately eclipsed the monastic tradition, inaugurating what Siân Echard has identified as the “new Latin” court literature of the twelfth century (*Arthurian* 31–5).

The economic importance to medieval ecclesiastic communities of sustaining a thriving cult of saints further militates against the likelihood that the *vitae* of venerated and popular local martyrs would have remained an “in-house” industry. The *vitae* express clear regional interests, often over contested or otherwise allocated territories—Padarn asserts church jurisdiction over Ceredigion, Carannog over holdings in Ceredigion and Leinster, Illtud over Glamorgan, Cadog over Dyfed, Euflamm over Tréguer in Brittany, Gildas over Glastonbury. Resembling petitions for property title they mimic literary warrants of conquest, suggesting not that they sought to garner internal support so much as they wanted land claims to be upheld by secular, feudal authority.⁷² Some fifty years in advance of Becket, these *vitae* appear to lobby beyond ecclesiastic communities for an economic and legal recognition that the authority of the church superseded that of mortal kings.⁷³ They do so with histories that upstage familiar warriors and local rulers with hero-saints appointed by God as British landholders.

Super-heroes of the Church and holy conquerors, the British saints in this corpus boast the grace of God in addition to the qualities of earthly nobility requisite to legitimate rule: high birth, worthy lineage, military strength, and generosity. Cadog is royal prince of Gwynlliog, *regia proles* (a child of royal birth, *Cadocus* §5); and Carannogs lineage—*tam facile est deducere ad Mariam, matrem Domini*, so easily traced to Mary, the Mother of God (*Carantocus* § 1)—ranks him above British kings: *nemo inter reges Britonum alcior habeture*, no man is accounted higher among the kings of Britain (*Carantocus* §1). Yet both choose service to God above the rule of men, despising earthly pomp and declining their earthly kingdoms.⁷⁴ Illtud exchanges his career as an earthly soldier to fight instead with the weapons of virtue and the armor of righteousness (*Illtud* §9). Saint Carannog, *fortis miles* (brave soldier) among unbelievers, traces his genealogy back to the Virgin Mary; and Saint Padarn, *dux cohortis* (leader of a troop) and *culmen perfectionis* (the height of perfection), shares with Christ a holy birth.⁷⁵ Like

their secular counterparts, these saints served as warriors in a system of patronage and reward, securing celestial as well as terrestrial honors for their service, and land divinely granted to saints is shown in the *vitae* to be incontestable, regardless of previous claims to possession.⁷⁶

In *Vita Sancti Paterni*,⁷⁷ Padarn's lineage of divine light "conquers" via peacemaking and community building, and the saint replaces secular warfare with the expansion of Christendom. His face radiates a divine light that reconciles warring Irish kings: *gratia uultus eius diaboli discordie propelluntur. Pax perpetua inter utrasque prouincias oritur, eterna unitas nascitur a Deo ...* (by the grace of his countenance the devils of discord are driven away. Perpetual peace springs up between both provinces; eternal unity is born from God..., *Paternus* §10). Padarn's glow illuminates more than his own face, and as he builds churches and monasteries *per totam Ceredicam* (across Ceredigion) so does his shine extend religion across Britain: *Sanctus igitur Paternus lampas in doctrina et opere effectus est per totam Brittanniam* (and so saint Padarn became a light in doctrine and practice throughout the whole of Britain, *Paternus* §14).⁷⁸ In a process of spiritualized acquisition and redistribution, Padarn divides Britain into three episcopacies, sharing insular jurisdiction with fellow Welsh saints Dewi and Teilo: *diuiserunt Brittaniam in tres episcopatus suos nisi postea malicia tyrannorum turbaret* (they divided Britain into their three episcopacies—unless afterwards the malice of tyrants might disorder them, Coe and Young 17). Thus in the figure of the saint religious leadership melds with territorial dominion, an independent, episcopal jurisdiction threatened only by the possibility of "tyrannical" secular rule—and in the *Vita Paterni* Arthur is indeed the *quidam tyrannus* whose malice and greed compete with and challenge the episcopal authority of the saint.

Arthur is likewise the *rex rebellis* of Caradoc of Llancarfan's *Vita Gildae*, a text that immediately establishes the supremacy of the saints' lineage while distancing Arthur from the greatness and military fame of Gildas' father and brothers. The saint's father, *rex Scotiae*, is *nobilissimus regum aquilonalium* (noblest of the kings of the north), his twenty-four sons all *victores bellicosos* (victorious warriors, *Gildas* §1). Though Gildas reportedly loves Arthur,⁷⁹ his warrior brothers challenge the *rex rebellis* constantly: *Confratres tamen XXIII resistebant regi rebelli praedicto, nolentes pati dominum, sed crebro fugabant et expellebant a saltu et bello* (nonetheless [Gildas'] 23 brothers constantly rose up against the afore-mentioned rebellious king, refused to accept him as their lord; they often routed him and drove him from forest and battle-field, *Gildas* §5). The saint's oldest brother, Hueil—*belliger assiduus et miles famosissimus, victoriosissimus iuvenum et optimus* (active warrior and most distinguished soldier, victorious and excellent youth)—often "swooped down from Scotland" to harass Arthur: *a Scotia veniebat [Hueil] saepissime, incendia ponebat, praedas ducebat cum victoria ac laude* (He would often swoop down from Scotland, set up conflagrations, and carry off spoils with

victory and renown). Hueil, according to the *vita*, is *himselffaturus rex*, and as an apparent rival to Arthur he is destined to become king—*ut aiebant et sperabant indigenae* (as the inhabitants used to assert and hope). Arthur kills Hueil (*suum fortissimum hostem*, his greatest enemy), nipping that prophetic hope in the bud—a prophetic hope that Geoffrey will soon transfer onto Arthur. Arthur's dominion in the *Vita Gildae*, however, as so often suggested in the later romance tradition, appears plagued by dissent and weakened by rival attack.

In *Vita Sancti Carantoci*, any Nennian hint of Arthur's Christian warrior prowess has disappeared, and here the saint replaces the king as protector and serpent-slayer, both taming “the most formidable serpent” through the power of prayer and protecting it against the sinners of Carrum, Arthurs land (*Carantocus* §4). Arthur himself embodies such local sin, for this entire episode turns around Arthurs deception and his covetous desire to steal Carannog's holy altar. The theft fails, however, for though Arthur “thought to convert [the altar] into a table, whatever was placed on it was thrown to a distance;” apparently in recognition of his unworthiness, Arthur subsequently repents by signing the region over to the saint *in sempiterno graphyo* (by written deed, §4).

Perhaps the most memorable Arthurian moment in this corpus is the prologue to *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, in which Arthurs involvement ensures the saint's conception in such a way that aligns him narratively with the dangerous lust that characterized the great British traitor Vortigern—a vice and an episode in the *Historia Brittonum* from which Arthur remains safely distant.⁸⁰ The saint's father King Gwynllyw kidnaps a neighbor woman for his wife and rides off with her while being hotly pursued by the woman's father and his army. Arthur, Cei, and Bedwyr, *tres heroes strenui* (three vigorous champions), who happen to be playing dice nearby, witness the chase and watch the king approach with the kidnapped girl:

Illis enimuero cernentibus regem cum puella sibi aporinquantem, Arthurus ilico libidine in amorem adolescentule nimium succensus, ac iniqua cogitatione plenus, consodalibus inquit, “Scitote me uehementer in concupiscentiam puelle huius, quam ille miles equitando deuehit, ac-cendi.” At illi prohibentes eum dixerunt, “Absit a te tantum seel us pa-trari, nos enim solidi sumus inopes anxiosque iuuare. Quocirca huic angustato prelio certaminis concurrentes cicius subueniamus.” At ille, “Quum ambo mauultis ei succerrere quam puellam mihi ab eo uiolenter dirripere, pergite obuiam eis, ac quis illorum sit heres diligenter huius terre sciscitami.” (*Cadocus*, Prologue)

And these seeing the king with a girl approaching them, Arthur immediately very inflamed with lust and desire for the maiden, and filled with evil thoughts, said to his companions, “Know that I am vehemently inflamed with concupiscence for this girl, whom that soldier is carrying away on horseback.” But they forbidding him said, “Far be it that so great a crime should be perpetuated by thee, for we are wont to aid the needy and distressed. Wherefore let us run together with all speed and assist this struggling contest that it may cease.” And Arthur [said], “Since you both prefer to succor him rather than snatch the girl violently from him for me, go to

And so Arthur, against his will and his lust, reluctantly assists the kidnapper Gwynllyw, who gains a wife *per patrocinium Arthuri triumphans* (through Arthur's protection). But the nobility of this protection becomes dubious, and Gwynllyw, though the saint's father, is described alternately as the ruler of *latrones* and *fares* (brigands and thieves, *Cadocus* §1). The *vita* quickly distances the saint from his questionable earthly lineage, and in a later encounter with Arthur he humiliates the king before the *principes* (principal nobles), *clerices* (clerics), *iudices* (judges), and *seniores totius Britannie* (elders of Britain): Arthur, humbled, agrees to recognize the priority of the saint's law, and the *vita* neatly and succinctly ratifies a monastic jurisdiction wholly independent and separate from the king's influence (*Cadocus* §22).

From among the variety of Arthurs encountered in pre-Galfridian British material, the Arthur of the saints' lives proves to be noticeably weaker, even as a colorful if somewhat seedy *rex*, than both the warrior-chieftain and *dux* of his Welsh and historiographical Latin counterparts. It is this deceptive, criminal, lustful, murderous, and besieged *Arturus rex* that Geoffrey of Monmouth so influentially reclaims from the *vitae* tradition, creating what is arguably the most powerful King Arthur in literature.

TWELFTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY (C. 1125–1133)

In the first half of the twelfth century, two figures of Hanning's so-called “new historiography”⁸¹ extol Arthur not only as a nationalist hero but as the supreme British king. Writing of Arthur in his 1125 *Gesta regum Anglorum*, the Benedictine monk William of Malmesbury describes “a man certainly worthy to be celebrated, not in the foolish dreams of deceitful fables, but in truthful histories; since for a long time he sustained the declining fortunes of his native land and incited the uncrushed courage of the people to war” (quoted by Fletcher 42). Williams' *Gesta* further recorded the source for local hope of Arthur's eventual return, writing that “the tomb of Arthur is nowhere beheld, whence [the] ancient ditt[y] [*antiquitas naeniarum*] fable [s] that he is yet to come” (quoted by Jarman, “Arthurian” 111).⁸²

Between 1130 and 1133, Henry Archdeacon of Huntingdon,⁸³ in his *Historia Anglorum*, sustained tradition by writing of Arthur as *dux militum et regum Britanniae* (98),⁸⁴ an epithet notable to Fletcher as both a pre-Galfridian and an English reference to Arthur not merely as preeminent among Britons but as the supreme British king (49). Henry provides a recognizable pastiche of the *Historia Brittonum*, Bede, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but he adds his own commentary to the provocative vagueness of these sources. After recounting the sites of Arthur's twelve battles made familiar by the *Historia Brittonum*, Henry editorializes on the transitory nature of Arthur's fame:

Hec autem bella et loca bellorum narrat quidam historiographus, que tamen omnia loca nostre etati incognita sunt. Quod prouidentia Dei factum esse putamus, ad despectum popularis aure, laudis adulatorie, fame transitorie. (*HA* 100–01)

One historian tells of these battles, and the places where they were fought, though none of the places can be identified now. I think that this has happened by the providence of God, so that popular favor, adulatory praise, and transitory fame might be set at naught.

To Henry, the contemporary absence of Arthurs mark on the landscape offers a lesson in mortality, emphasizing that however great his past glory, the present *popularis aure, laus*, and *fama* of the *dux-rex* Arthur are to be despised (*despido*).

Later in his career Henry similarly insists on Arthurs end—even after being so impressed by the history book he read at Le Bec (*quem apud Beccum inveni*, *HA* 582). In his Letter to *Warine Brito*, a condensed version of *liber grandis Galfridi Arturi* (Geoffrey Arthurs great book, *HA* 582),⁸⁵ Henry recounts how Arthur fell in battle. He concludes with a disdainful reference to a continued belief among the British in Arthurs return:

Mortuum tamen fuisse Britones parentes tui negant. Et eum uenturum sollempniter expectant. Fuit equidem uir temporibus suis omnium summus, milicia, largitate, facecia. (*HA* 580–1)

But the British, your ancestors, refuse to believe that [Arthur] died. And they traditionally await his return. For in his day he was certainly supreme over all men in warfare, liberality, and courtesy.

To both historians, Arthur is *vir* as much as great leader and king; Henry in particular stresses Arthurs mortality and so discounts any expectation of a lasting spirit of his supremacy.

Thus, toward the end of Henry I's reign, and on the eve of the turmoil of Stephens nineteen-year "anarchy," English chroniclers wrote respectfully of Arthur as a strong (if mortal) man, as a nationalist *dux-rex* of Britain's past. William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon are certainly not the only twelfth-century writers who recorded bits of information about Arthur (e.g. Bullock-Davies, "*Exspectare*"). My point here is that the legend of Arthur's political preeminence as both *rex* and *dux* of a united Britain is the creation of two English cleric-historiographers writing for prominent secular patrons in the 1120s and 1130s. Their accounts of Arthurian history represent a continuation of the pre-Galfridian Latin tradition examined briefly in this chapter. They also figure prominently in the career and work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the first writer to combine in any elaboration the myth of British political unity with the figure of a single, powerful native king. As such, William and Henry provide a fitting pivot on which to turn now to a discussion of the *Historia regum Britannie*.

Chapter Two

Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Politicization of King Arthur

The rich ambiguity of the *Historia regum Britannie* (c. 1138),¹ its adaptability to myriad critical interpretations, and the suggestive vagueness of our knowledge of Geoffrey of Monmouth have all inspired tremendous amounts of scholarly attention.² But perhaps “one of his greatest coups,” to quote Julia Crick, was to introduce his transformed and greatly developed King Arthur to a non-Welsh, Latin, and predominantly clerical audience (Crick, “Geoffrey” 358).

Three times in the *Historia* Geoffrey refers to himself as *Monemutensis* (HRB ix);³ this, along with a demonstrated geographical familiarity of the region, has led to the general assumption that he was born in Monmouth. Though possibly Welsh, Breton, or Cornish (Padel, “Geoffrey”), Geoffrey nonetheless spent much of his adult life in Oxford, where he left traces of a lengthy career in the service of the archbishop. As *Galfridus Arturus* (or *Artur*),⁴ he witnessed seven charters in Oxford between 1129 and 1151, six of which were also witnessed by his “friend” Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford.⁵ In November of 1153 *Galfridus de S. Asaph episcopus* witnessed the peace settlement at Winchester that reconciled King Stephen and Henry of Anjou, a fact suggesting that Geoffrey's clerical career of over twenty years had earned him not only a bishopric but significant respect and status. To be sure, the dedications in the *Historia*, appealing to proponents of both sides of the “civil” war, can be seen to lend a certain reconciliatory diplomacy to Geoffrey's work⁶—or they can indicate a more opportunistic if duplicitous courting of rival Anglo-French claimants to the English throne. Regardless of Geoffrey's intentions, the Francophone patrons he solicited through dedication link him to the most powerful nobles of his day.

Composing at least three separate dedications, Geoffrey alternately inscribed his *Historia* to Robert of Gloucester alone, to Robert and Waleran of Meulan, and to King Stephen and Robert.⁷ The *Prophetie Merlini*,⁸ inserted into the *Historia* just prior to the reign of King Arthur, are dedicated to Alexander bishop of Lincoln, nephew of Henry I's chief Justiciar and yet a loyal supporter of Stephen, even following his arrest at Stephen's court in 1139.⁹ Gloucester, illegitimate son of Henry I—an *alterum Henricum* in Geoffrey's words, *quem innata probitas in milicia militibus prefecit* (a second

Henry, whom innate talent in military affairs put in charge of our soldiers, *HRB* xiii)—was the chief proponent of his half-sister Matilda's claim to the throne. In her absence, he managed an alternative royal administration on her behalf, secured an impressive territorial base emanating from Bristol and Gloucester, and even minted coins in his own name.¹⁰ Robert's counterpart and *altera regni nostri columpna* (a second pillar of our kingdom, *HRB* xiii), Waleran of Meulan had become by 1139 the most influential magnate in Stephen's court, an acknowledged leader of what David Crouch has deemed a "purely Norman nobility" (Crouch 14, 35–7, 43; King 169–79, on Waleran's assumption of regalian rights). King Stephen, remembered by his contemporaries for a nineteen-year reign of turmoil and civil war, himself had never set foot in England prior to his coup of 1135.¹¹ Stephen's preferment of continental Frenchmen in fact fueled rivalries and disputes between his new earls¹²—described by John Gillingham as "cross-Channel magnates"—and the equally Francophone nobility whose lands, interests, and careers had long been based exclusively in England.¹³ It was thus to rivals in the French dynastic fight for England that Geoffrey addressed his history of native British kingship.

In Gloucester and Alexander of Lincoln, Geoffrey also targeted with his British history two well-established patrons of English historiography. William of Malmesbury dedicated his *Gesta regum Anglorum* (Deeds of the Kings of England, c. 1118–1143) to Robert of Gloucester, who later commissioned William's *Historia novella* (Recent History, c. 1140–1143).¹⁴ Geoffrey may also have sought to spark Gloucester's interest in the historical origins of the Welsh, an ethnic group that represented a sizeable proportion of his political support.¹⁵ Before 1130 Alexander "the Magnificent" of Lincoln had commissioned the *Historia Anglorum* from Henry of Huntingdon, requesting that he "narrate the history of this kingdom and the origins of our people" (*HA* lvii). Alexander evidently knew Geoffrey to be fluent in Welsh, for he turned to him sometime in the 1130s to request a Latin translation of Merlin's Welsh prophecies (*HRB* c110; Thorpe 170–1). Recognized by contemporaries as Welsh (or Anglo-Welsh), Geoffrey directs a glorious Welsh past specifically to influential Francophone nobility involved both literally and figuratively in efforts to incorporate the Anglo-French into *historia Anglorum*. His message seems pointed: the current-day Welsh, as descendants of the Trojans and the Britons, enjoy significant precedence on the island as compared to the relatively late arrival of the *Saxones*, the *Angli*. His is an alternative national myth—a "fantasy of empire"¹⁶—presented both to a Francophone elite and to the Welsh.

Geoffrey's base in Oxford would indeed have provided first-hand experience with the twists and turns of Stephen's reign, and Geoffrey would have been familiar with early clashes between his various patrons. Stephens "Oxford charter of liberties" of 1136 made several welcomed concessions to the Church, but it was only three years later at Stephen's Oxford court in 1139

that, on the counsel of Waleran of Meulan, Alexander of Lincoln was arrested with his brother Nigel of Ely and his uncle Roger of Salisbury, all on the charges of treason and collusion with the Empress Matilda.¹⁷ Not long thereafter, Matilda made Oxford her base and principal residence, capitalizing on gains won from Stephen's defeat and capture at the Battle of Lincoln in 1141,¹⁸ Geoffrey's life in Oxford thus afforded him a bird's-eye view of the intrigues and power struggles leading up to the civil war, and his roles as cleric and political spectator may have influenced the revisions and different versions of his dedications. If, as has been suggested, preferment rather than peace-making or counter-history was Geoffrey's principal aim (e.g. Shichtman and Finke), then his *Historia* largely failed, for minor promotion came to him only late in life.¹⁹ He died in 1155 (*Bruty Tywysogyon* 132).²⁰

If Geoffrey's British history failed to garner his promotion from Norman-French magnates, it nonetheless attracted almost immediate attention. With more creative imagination than his contemporaries, Geoffrey perfected a brand of *historia* that reveled in narrative invention.²¹ Indeed, although opinions differ widely on Geoffrey's intentions, there is no disputing the overall originality of his *Historia* and the creative artistry of what has alternately been termed "fictional factuality" (Spiegel 62),²² *historia fantastica* (Echard, *ANLT* 33), and, more generally, "serious entertainment" (Partner). Geoffrey's *historia fantastica* constitutes, in the words of Siân Echard, a "subversion of the writing of history," a "ludic employment of language" that distinguishes the *Historia* from all other contemporary historiography (*ANLT* 33, 36).²³ Geoffrey's innovative manipulation of sources, his facetious use of Latin,²⁴ his pervasive yet ambiguous political sentiment, his carefully imitative narrative structure—all imbue his *Historia* with the playful, subversive authority that has inspired from its inception such varied and disparate scholarly reactions. It was, for instance, with the stunned amazement of a frustrated researcher that Henry of Huntingdon reported discovering in 1139 the very account of insular history for which he himself had often searched without success.²⁵ More than eight centuries later at least one other historian remained convinced of the veracity of Geoffrey's British source, if not of his history.²⁶ Today most scholars recognize narrative innovation rather than "authentic history" as Geoffrey's greatest achievement (*HRB* xviii). That said, a quest for the truth of Geoffrey's intentionality, for the underlying purpose and aim of his fabricated history—a truth located in his style, his politics, or in his nationality—has shaped and directed the way many modern readers have interpreted the *Historia*.

David Howlett, for instance, has detailed the highly rhetorical "biblical style" that structures Geoffrey's history of unbroken British kingship with a "mathematically determined disposition of diction," a pointed use of authoritative, narrative fixity that imitated and one-upped the contemporary English histories of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon.²⁷ According to Howlett, such competitive imitation of narrative structure was a

playful challenge issued to like-minded, rival intellectuals. To Valerie Flint, Geoffrey's aim was similarly competitive and stylistic, his sole purpose to write anti-monastic parodies of contemporary English histories.²⁸ Her work builds on that of Christopher Brooke, who suggested that Geoffrey's humor and parody took priority over any other motive. All of these scholars are heir to the magisterial work of the great Welsh historian Sir John Edward Lloyd, who wrote in 1911 that Geoffrey's "first and last thought was for literary effect" (*History of Wales* 528).

All for literary effect except, perhaps, when it came to *quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum* (the certain very ancient book written in the British language, *HRB* ç1) that Geoffrey claimed to have translated at the request of Walter Archdeacon of Oxford. Able literary critics who otherwise appreciate the extent of Geoffrey's imagination and his fondness for literary tropes surrender, albeit with resistance, the possibility that this book actually existed. Belief in the text ignited furor over the book's original language,²⁹ and efforts to establish the veracity of the lost source sought also to determine whether Geoffrey was more influenced by continental Breton or by insular Welsh material.³⁰ Taking the existence of the book very seriously, Geoffrey Ashe has proposed Jordanes' Latin *Gothic History*, c. 551, as the possible source. Via the fragmentary Breton-Latin *Vita Sancti Wohednouii* (the Life of St. Goueznou), Jordanes' history may have influenced Geoffrey's account of Arthur's Gallic wars, Arthur's title "King of the Britons"—Jordanes' *riothamus*—and his ambiguous, deathless disappearance.³¹ Brynley F. Roberts has perhaps more modestly suggested that Walter could have brought from Brittany a manuscript of regnal genealogies ("Geoffrey" 101; "Welsh Tradition" 32); while David Howlett considers the source to be a "spectacularly successful fraud," well in keeping with medieval narrative tradition, a competitive challenge to the contemporary historians who vied for support from the same patrons (25).

Geoffrey's own origin has become as important a scholarly question as the origin of his source book, and J. E. Lloyd has also held remarkable sway with his contention that Geoffrey was more Breton than Welsh. As early as 1911 he first suggested that the *Historia* reflected distinct cultural bias in its favorable portrait of the Bretons and its markedly negative representations of the Welsh (*History of Wales* 523–4).³² Brynley F. Roberts has long sustained this view of Geoffrey's political and cultural ambivalence toward Wales and the Welsh, suggesting more recently that Geoffrey's Breton sympathies reflected a firm alliance with continental French culture in general and with Norman authority in particular ("Geoffrey" 98–9). To Roberts, Geoffrey was an "Anglo-Norman" author ("Welsh Tradition" 29), a "Norman courtier" with "little regard for the Welsh" who sought preferment with a history meant to appeal not to insular Britons but to their Norman conquerors (*Brut y Brenhinedd* x, xxiii).³³

Many have alternately read Geoffrey's *Historia* in a pro-Norman context

of twelfth-century cross-Channel politics, seeing in the Galfridian Arthur an anticipation of the Angevin empire of Henry II.³⁴ Linking Geoffrey through his powerful dedicatees (Robert of Gloucester and Alexander of Lincoln) to both Henry I Beauclerc and the Empress Matilda, Gordon Hall Gerould and Roger Sherman Loomis debated not only whether Geoffrey wrote to bolster the legitimacy of Britain's French rulers, but also whether his *Arthuriad* in particular aimed to please an Anglo-Norman monarchy intent on rivaling the Capetian claim to the legacy of the emperor Charlemagne (see also Brown's response).³⁵ Certainly not writing for the Welsh (there was no profit in it³⁶), Geoffrey instead delivered to Anglo-Norman kings the dynastic hero they needed to compete with *les rois thaumaturges* across the Channel (Gerould 40–45).³⁷ R. Howard Bloch has expressed this opinion unequivocally: “The *Historia Regum Britannie* can only be understood within a nationalist context, since there is little doubt that it was intended to serve the ideological interests of the Angevine monarchy as against the kings of France” (*Etymologies* 82). Geoffrey's King Arthur was viewed as the new Norman-British hero, created to provide lineage and legitimacy to a precariously new and foreign dynasty of insular French rulers.

Finding Geoffrey equally complicit with centralizing Anglo-Norman regimes, Stephen Knight has detected throughout the *Historia* a “euphemization” of the career of Henry I, a “detailed web of Norman ideology” in Geoffrey's British kings (*ALS* 52). Knight never doubted Geoffrey's underlying Welshness, however, and in fact located in Geoffrey's “pro-Welsh” puns and jokes a certain cultural apologia for his professional support of the Normans.³⁸ In her more recent *Faces of Time*, Jean Blacker recast Geoffrey's Arthur as an insular answer to the continental legend of Charlemagne. But like Knight, Blacker placed Geoffrey on political middle ground, arguing that his account of a legitimizing Trojan ancestry accommodated not only the ruling foreign elite but also the native Welsh. Just as Dudo of St. Quentin had claimed in the eleventh century a Trojan ancestry for the Vikings of Normandy, so did Geoffrey, by tracing the Welsh back to the Trojan Brutus, provide an illustrious lineage for the “other” side—the insular side—of the Anglo-Norman nobility (*Faces of Time* 163–66).³⁹ Thus Geoffrey's history allowed both settlers and natives to reap the cultural benefit of Trojan descent.

Other scholars have imagined two separate audiences for the *Historia*. English historian John Gillingham, for one, has found Geoffrey to be decidedly pro-Welsh. Geoffrey's rivalry with English historians was not so much the competitive sport and linguistic gaming suggested by Howlett, Flint, and Echard, but rather the “politics of [Welsh] cultural nationalism.” Gillingham has argued that Geoffrey's *Historia* offered a direct response to the “new” anti-Welsh rhetoric of William of Malmesbury's *De gestis regum* (c. 1125) (“Context” 101, 106–8).⁴⁰ Written, moreover, in the exhilarating and promising aftermath of the “great revolt” of allied Welsh princes, Geoffrey's history of pre-Roman insular kingship and civilization aimed to secure

cultural respectability for Wales (Gillingham, "Context" 110–12).⁴¹ But whether Geoffrey has been viewed as rhetorical gamester or nationalist Welsh advocate, Gillingham and other recent scholars have collectively insisted on Geoffrey's innovative use of *historia* to create a recognizably complex and authoritative British "counter history"—a revision not only of standard accounts of past Roman occupation, but also, presumably, the potential revision of the unrest of contemporary foreign rule.⁴² Whereas earlier scholarly attention to Geoffrey's historical milieu rightly asserted the mobility of medieval cultural production as well as the intimate relationship between literature and the dynastic politics of the Anglo-Norman monarchy,⁴³ it is with Gillingham's return to such a historicizing approach that Geoffrey's stylistic subversion becomes also the political subversion not simply of an obsequious Anglo-Norman courtier but of a proud and savvy Briton.⁴⁴

A counter history to foreign control in Britain—whether Roman, Saxon, or Norman-French—is precisely what Geoffrey provided. This is not to minimize the allure that the *Historia* held for the ruling French. Far from it: die alacrity with which Wace undertook its vernacular transmission indicates the text's appeal to the Anglo-Angevin elite. Geoffrey clearly wrote for two separate audiences, and he addressed both of them directly: his Francophone patron (s) and the Welsh.⁴⁵ The *Historia* unflinchingly chronicles the dissolution of British political unity and the loss of native sovereignty. But Geoffrey's revision of familiar British histories and his new and much-elaborated version of the reign of King Arthur also stage a British "resurrection" (Shichtman and Finke 3), one that lingers in depth on the culmination of a military history of native kingship, offers proof of a glorious, civilized insular past, and issues the prophetic promise of eventual British recovery. At a time when other clerics were writing insular histories of the English, and when rival Francophone kings seemed to be confirming foreign control over Britain, Geoffrey's history created a new national myth and imagined an alternative. Loss is indeed a principal theme. Yet Geoffrey adumbrates loss with both distinct native character and prophecy, both of which all but guarantee that Britain will eventually reunite under the rule of a native British king—a guarantee later perceived as a "deadly threat" to English supremacy (R. R. Davies, *FEE* 40).

Such a "double appeal to conqueror and vanquished" was undoubtedly a forceful element in the rapid dissemination of Geoffrey's work (*Brut y Brenhinedd* 55). Over two hundred manuscript copies of the *Historia* survive (fifty-eight from the twelfth century), making Geoffrey's work the greatest "best seller" of the period.⁴⁶ Its success and influence were immediate, leading by the early thirteenth century to translations into French, English, and Welsh. Already by the late 1130s and early 1140s historians such as Henry of Huntingdon had revised their own histories with details from Geoffrey's text (Johnson, "Anglo-Norman *Description*" 12n3). Familiarity with the Galfridian Arthur can be discerned in the Anglo-Norman verse

Description of England,⁴⁷ in which the *Waleis*, confident of recovering Britain *par Artur*, violently hound the *Franceis*:

Ben s'en vengerent les Waleis.
De noz Franceis mult unt ocis,
De noz chastels se sunt saisiz;
Apertement le vont disant,
Forment nus vont maneçant,
Qu'a la parfin tute l'avrunt,
Par Artur la recoverunt,
E cest pais tut ensement
Toldrunt a la romaine gent,
A la terre sun nun rendrunt,
Bretaine la repelerunt. (Bell 11. 218–28)

Well have the Welsh avenged themselves.
Of our French they have killed many,
Our castles they have seized;
Openly they go about saying it—
Fiercely they go about threatening us—
That in the end they will have everything,
With Arthur they will recover it,
And so this country
They will take back from the Roman race
They will give back to the land its name—
They will call it Britain again.⁴⁸

It is in the context of this passage that Gillingham has emphatically declared “there can be no doubt that the figure of Arthur was perceived as a threat to the Anglo-Norman rulers” (“Context” 112). By 1155 *maistre* Wace had translated the *Historia* into less threatening (and ultimately more lasting) French octosyllabic couplets for the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II Plantagenet.⁴⁹ Roughly eighty manuscripts containing Wace's *Roman de Brut* survive, and as many of Layamon's Old English alliterative *Brut* of the last decade of the twelfth century. There are nearly sixty manuscripts containing versions of the Welsh *Brut y Brenhinedd* the earliest three deemed “careful translations” of the *Historia* from the first half of the thirteenth century (*Brut y Brenhinedd* xxiv, xxxiv, xxxix). Later versions seem to have proliferated at times of Welsh political crises. The continental French romancer Chretien de Troyes certainly knew Geoffrey's Arthur, likely through Wace, and as we shall see he made a career of systematically rewriting him. Regardless of Geoffrey's own nationality or political sympathies, his Arthur, quintessential warrior-king and model of future insular glory, captured separate collective imaginations in Britain and was used as a national symbol equally by the Anglo-Angevin monarchy as by English, Welsh, and continental French writers.⁵⁰

In marked contrast to the bulk of the fragmentary material reviewed in the previous chapter, Geoffrey's *Historia* offers the first substantial account of King Arthur as well as the first substantial account of pre-Roman kingship and civilization in Britain. His is a predominantly martial history of nineteen

hundred years of unbroken native kingship from Brutus to the seventh-century reign of Cadwallader (d. 689), punctuated by strong, civic-minded rulers who wage almost constant war but also construct cities and highways, build churches, safeguard agriculture, and enact laws. Geoffrey echoes the lineage ascribed to Britain's eponymous founder in the *Historia Brittonum* (ç10),⁵¹ again tracing insular ancestry back to a survivor of Troy to make Brutus the original Greco-Briton. But Geoffrey places greater insistence on a Britain that has always been ruled by Britons, and his foundation myth and the *Historia* in general refute familiar accounts of insular subjection to Rome.⁵² Far from conquered by or subject to the Romans, Geoffrey's Britons *precede* the Romans. They speak Greek,⁵³ and though they may share with the Romans a “link of glorious kinship,” a “common inheritance of noble blood,”⁵⁴ Geoffrey's British branch of Trojan nobility proves far superior: Cassivelaunus twice defeats Caesar in battle (çç56–60; 110–13), Belinus and Brennius triumphantly sack Rome (ç43; 97–9), Constantine crowns himself Roman Emperor (ç79; 133), and Arthur is recalled to Britain just as he is about to launch what would have been the most definitive of his several victories against the Romans.⁵⁵ In this manner Geoffrey recasts Bede's native insular barbarians as the civilized descendants of Troy, just as he replaces histories of Roman occupation with the military superiority of British kings.

To this end Geoffrey pauses dramatically on the reign of King Arthur, combining in one ruler all the signatory attributes of great British kings to freeze-frame the culmination of insular empire. As noted by Ad Putter, Geoffrey's Arthurian section takes advantage of previously “unused story-time,” filling in the many “gaps” left by previous chroniclers and historiographers, so much so that the comparatively dense narrative development of this section interrupts and lulls the otherwise staccato “king portraits” that pattern the rest of the *Historia* (“Finding Time”).⁵⁶ Witness one representative example of the terse, rhythmic highs and lows of British kingship: “After the death of Cunedagius, his son Rivallo succeeded him, a peaceful, prosperous young man who ruled the kingdom frugally. In his time it rained blood for three days and men died from the flies that swarmed. Rivallo's son Gurgustius succeeded him” (Thorpe 87).⁵⁷ In contrast, more than one fourth of the *Historia* details events leading up to and encompassing Arthur's reign—a weighty fifth of the whole focuses exclusively on the roughly forty years of Arthur's life.⁵⁸ Put another way, in a history spanning nearly two millennia and chronicling the reigns of one hundred and nine kings, Geoffrey's Arthuriad dramatically suspends time and retards the course of history by lingering on five kings and fixating on one golden reign in particular. Thus elaborating extensively on the short Arthurian chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*, Geoffrey is the first to provide details of Arthur's lineage, conception, and prophesied rise to power; of his charismatic leadership, territorial conquests, and feared battle savagery; of his famous weapons, his best-known knights, and his world-renowned court.⁵⁹

Structurally, moreover, by sandwiching Arthur's reign between the *Prophetic Merlini* and the equally prophetic *vox angelica*,⁶⁰ Geoffrey both heralds Arthur's rise and attenuates his fall with the vaticinatory promise of British recovery, of the inevitable post-Arthurian victory yet to come. Though British decline and the loss of native sovereignty in many ways obfuscate hope of future resurgence, the lengthy narrative pause on the success and glory of Geoffrey's warrior-king and conqueror nonetheless dominates the *Historia*.

To be sure, Geoffrey never hides or softens the basic trajectory of his history, an account of how the once-great Britons lose strength, territory, and identity to the debilitating effects of civil war and foreign conquest. His narration ends with the final subjection of the *Gualenses* (Welsh), the exile of Britain's last native ruler, and the crowning of the first Saxon king of *Loegria* (England) (ç207; 284). *Gualenses* and *Loegria* are no haphazard slips in nomenclature. The *Historia* moves inexorably toward this final demotion of native identity and territory from British and Britian to Welsh and Wales, when Geoffrey renames the now-degenerate dynasty of Brutus as the self-destructive, defeated, barbarous Welsh, driven into the western corners of the island (ç207; 284).⁶¹ Geoffrey identifies the Welsh of his day as but lesser remnants of great Trojan ancestors who ruled over the entire island.⁶² Thus even from its initial descriptions Geoffrey's story is clearly that of the loss of British sovereignty.⁶³ The overall narrative pattern, one that repeats "cycles of history" that "never benefit the Britons for long," likewise insists on the transitory nature of both good kings and strong rule (Echard, *ANLT* 51, 63).⁶⁴ Still, it is just such loss—military defeat, near-annihilation, and forced exile—that proves to be the primary trauma out of which Geoffrey constructs the original character and personality of legitimate British kingship, so that integral to what Robert Hanning called this "fall of Britain text" is Brutus' lineage of strength, survival, and divinely favored destiny (123). As noted by Brynley Roberts, Geoffrey frames his history around two exiles, Brutus and Cadwallader—the first "virile" and "ambitious," the second "tired" and "defeated" (*Bruty Brenhinedd* xxi). But it seems just such an ending that allows the reader to anticipate the next rise in the cycle. Rather than Roberts' wholly "somber" ending, rather than simply "devastating" British readership with the false lull of Arthur's successes or the deceptive suspension of inevitable decline (Echard, *ANLT* 49), the Arthuriad in many ways recreates in its conclusion the very bleakness required to call forth another Brutus or another Arthur. If, as Echard has contended, narrative doublings within the Arthuriad emphasize pending doom, narrative doublings that align Brutus with both Arthur and Cadwallader emphasize with equal force a legacy of survival and the potential for resurgence. Before turning attention to the Arthuriad, then, a brief look at Geoffrey's initial king portrait.

For Brutus and his descendants, Britain represents the *promissa insula*, the *insula quam ei diuinas predixerat* (the island that divine prophecy had promised would be his, ç20; 71). Just as Merlin later foretells the conquests

and victories of the *aper Cornubie* (the Boar of Cornwall, çç112, 118; 171–2, 187), and the *vox angelica* (the Angelic Voice, ç205; 282–3) alleviates final defeat with the promise of eventual British recovery of the island, so too does Geoffrey mark the beginning of his *Historia* with prophecy, specifically the oracular dream vision in which the goddess Diana bestows upon Brutus and the Trojans an empty, uninhabited island *trans Gallica*, beyond Gaul:⁶⁵ *Hic fiet natis altera Troia tuis./Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, et ipsis/Totius terre subditus orbis erit* (For your descendants it will be a second Troy. A race of kings will be born there from your stock and the round circle of the whole earth will be subject to them, ç16; 64–5).

Diana's gift of an *altera Troia* signals the end of exile for Brutus, himself an exile from a line of exiles, and it is on his circuitous path to reach his island that Geoffrey details Brutus' worthiness as both nation-founder and eponymous first king. Indeed, Geoffrey opens his *Historia* with the flight of Aeneas from the defeat and ruin of Troy. Such displacement is passed on to his great-grandson, Brutus, who is also forced into exile after inadvertently killing both his mother and father, and the early story of Brutus aims to recuperate a criminally ignominious heritage of both military flight and double parricide.⁶⁶ Brutus encounters and joins the descendants of Priam's son, Helenus, enslaved in Greece since the fall of Troy, and, earning fame among them as a wise and generous military commander,⁶⁷ he is soon elected to lead a Trojan insurrection against their Greek captors. *Dux reliquiarum Troie*, leader of those who survived the fall of Troy (ç8), Brutus masterminds a series of *callidos* (cunning) guerilla attacks that surprise and decimate the Greeks. A merciless and ubiquitous obstacle to any who would escape, Brutus delights in the slaughter he has orchestrated: *Quos diffugientes Brutus infestat, infestatos ueropartim in undis, partim super ripam prosternit. Et nunc hac nunc iliac discurrens duplicem necem ipsis ingestam esse letatur* ç9 (Brutus attacked them as they fled, and by his assault he slaughtered some of them in the river and others on the bank. This double death which he was inflicting gave him immense pleasure as he rushed to and fro in the battle, 57). He cuts down unarmed men in their beds⁶⁸ as easily as he cuts them down from behind, reveling in the sheer number of the dead—*Brutus matutino gaudio*.⁶⁹ The Greeks are slaughtered (*internecare, interficere, perimere*) and butchered (*lanare*) *uelut oues ex improviso a lupis occupate*, like sheep suddenly attacked by wolves (ç13; 61), and it is precisely such brutal, merciless resistance to captivity and slavery that mark the *nobilitas, fama* and *genus* (race) of Brutus—born *ex genere Priami et Anchise* (ç15): “Who other but [Brutus],” asks the defeated Greek king, “could have freed from their chains the exiles of Troy, when they were enslaved by so many mighty princes?” (*Quis etenim alter exules Troie in seruitutem tot et tantorum principum positos eorumdem uinculis eriperet?* 63; ç15).

Once free of the Greeks,⁷⁰ Brutus and the Trojans travel westward in search of their promised island, ravaging the Pictish kingdom of Aquitaine

along the way and vanquishing the armies of Gaul (çç17–20). Battle scenes again reinforce in Brutus the unflinching martial prowess that will give new identity to his band of *ignobiles exules* (ignoble exiles, ç20), and it is *cum uictoria* (in “the full glory of his victory”) that the Trojans become Britons, their new island Britain, and their dialect of Greek British.⁷¹

Brutus also forges a legacy of political unity that survives both the coming of the Romans and the waves of Saxon invasions that increase after the reign of Arthur. Brutus' *ciuitas*, his *Troia Noua*,⁷² remains a lasting symbol of central British sovereignty. Brutus divides the island into districts to distribute among his three sons Locrinus, Kamber, and Albanactus—the eponymous founders of England, Wales, and Scotland—but the “supremacy of the Crown of London” remains central to the *Historia* (Roberts, “Geoffrey” 101–102).⁷³ Geoffrey's post-Arthurian kings of Britain rule in fact over *totius insule* (çç 181, 182, 183, 200), and it is following the reign of Arthur that Geoffrey articulates most clearly this myth of a single crown, when Cadwallo (Cadwallader's father) and his counselors refuse to divide the *regnum Britanniae* on the grounds that “it was contrary to law and to the customs of their ancestors that an island with one crown should be placed under the sway of two crowned heads,” 270 (*contra ius ueterumque traditionem esse insulam unius coronae duobus coronatis submitti debere* ç192). The history of British sovereignty thus begins for Geoffrey with Brutus and his reversal of Trojan flight, displacement, and defeat. Such is the very state of loss and exile that marks the final reign of Cadwallader, and the narrative pattern of regained autonomy established by the story of Brutus does much to ease and relieve the otherwise bleak finality of the *Historia*.

The rise and fall of Geoffrey's Arthuriad has been described as a “microcosm” of the *Historia* in general (Tatlock 393), and the rhythm of the entire text certainly alternates between strong reigns and weak, between good kings and bad. Arthur's conception, driven by Uther Pendragon's lust and orchestrated by Merlin's magic, reiterates that success and glory in Britain's cyclic history follow, if not stem directly from, betrayal and deception.⁷⁴ Yet, the lengthy narrative emphasis on Arthur's successive military victories and on the extended periods of peace in his reign significantly differentiates the tempo and tone of the Arthurian section of the history.⁷⁵ Young, generous, and wise, a re-builder of churches and patron of monasteries,⁷⁶ his City of Legions famous for its churches and “adorned with palaces” that rival those of Rome, Geoffrey's peace-time Arthur and his lavish plenary *curia* anticipate the “courtly” themes that will later come to dominate French romance. Equally important to Geoffrey's portrait of kingship are the charismatic leadership, military prowess, and general affinity for warfare that together forge an empire of inimitable force. In the early years of his reign, the fifteen-year-old Arthur conquers the Saxons, Scots, Picts, and Irish in Britain before expanding his realm with the conquests of Iceland, Gotland, the Orkneys, Norway, Denmark, and Gaul. An otherwise pessimistic and staccato pattern of

kingship thus breaks down in the longest section of the *Historia*, and though we encounter Arthur with the full knowledge of his placement in a larger history of loss, we linger with detail on his success, recognizing him (as did medieval readers—Crick, “Geoffrey” 367) as the Boar of Cornwall prophesied to bring relief to Britain from Saxon oppression.⁷⁷ Such extended narrative attention to the many successes of Arthur’s reign remains vivid in the memory, so that native glory is easy to imagine when the *vox angelica* promises British renewal and the fulfillment of Merlins prophesy. With a careful narrative structure, then, Geoffrey’s *Historia* does not merely insist on loss, but rather heralds the next cycle of unified pan-British kingship, when, after the *alienigenes* (foreigners) have been slaughtered,

Tunc erit strages alienigenarum, tunc flumina sanguine manabunt. Tunc erumpent Armorici montes et diademate Bruti coronabuntur. Replebitur Kambria letitia et robora Cornubie uirescent. Nomine Bruti uocabitur insula et nuncupatio extraneorum peribit. (§115)

the mountains of Armorica shall erupt and Armorica itself shall be crowned with Brutus’ diadem. Kambria shall be filled with joy and the Cornish oaks shall flourish. The island shall be called by the name of Brutus and the title given to it by the foreigners shall be done away with. (175)

Reminiscent of Brutus’ liberation of the Trojans, righteous aggression against usurping Saxons likewise launches Arthur’s reign. Geoffrey in fact recalls much of the warrior Brutus in his portrait of Arthur, and both kings share a particular delight in close combat. “White hot in the fierceness of his rage,” Arthur laughs (*in risum*) as he single-handedly slays the monster of Mont-Saint-Michel, “driving the whole length of the blade into his head just where his brain was protected by his skull,” 239, 240 (*Arturus uero acri ignescens.... Arturus itaque reuocata uirtute ocius elabitur et celeriter nunc hinc nunc illine nefandum gladio diuerberabat nee quieuit donec letali uulnere illato totum mu-cronem capiti impressit qua testa cerebrum protegebatur* §165). Arthur thus echoes Brutus, most strikingly in the combination of a cruel, savage battle fury with exemplary military command. When Geoffrey first presents him as a fifteen-year-old boy king, Arthur already understands the importance of patronage, and with the generous promise of looted wealth he amasses an army to march on York and reclaim from the Saxons the whole of Britain:

Arturus ergo, quia in illo probitas largitionem comitabatur, statuit Saxones inquietare ut eorum opibus quae ei famulabatur ditaret familiam. Commonebat etiam id rectitudo, cum totius insule monarchiam de-buerat hereditario iure obtinere. (§143)

In Arthur courage was closely linked with generosity, and he made up his mind to harry the Saxons, so that with their wealth he might reward the retainers who served his own household. The justness of his cause encouraged him, for he had a claim by rightful inheritance to the kingship of the whole island. (212)

Following his siege of York, Arthur faces renewed Saxon invasion from the north, and with the help of the King of Brittany the Britons win the battles of Lincoln and Caledon Wood (§§143–145), “inflicting unheard of slaughter upon the Saxons,” 214–5 (*inauditam cedem inferentes* §145). Demoralized (*stupefacti*), the Saxons request permission to return to *Germania*, and after taking counsel Arthur agrees, keeping Saxon treasure, hostages, and the promise of additional tribute—*Arturus quesito consilio petitioni eorum adqueiuit* (§145; 215). The Saxons set sail, only to return immediately to decimate the region around Totnes. Arthur responds decisively in the face of such “astonishing [and] extraordinary duplicity” (216), having his Saxon hostages summarily executed (... *admirans ultra modum ipsorum facinus iudicium fieri iussit de illorum obsidibus breui hora suspendendis* §146). Thus begins the Battle of Bath, a bloody massacre that becomes the full-scale extermination not only of all the Saxons in Britain—“the Saxons, whose very name is an insult to heaven and detested by all men,” 216 (*impiissimi atque inuisi nominis Saxones* §146)—but also of their allies the Picts, Scots, and Irish (§§146–9; 216–20. Arthur demands slaughter *sine pietate* (§148; 218), restoring peace throughout the island with “unparalleled severity,” 219 (*incommutabili seucie indulgens* §49).

Yet more systematically than in the case of Brutus' delight in slaughter,⁷⁸ Arthur's campaign against the Saxons and their allies (*proditores, pagani, barbarica* §§146; 147; 149) serves a higher purpose—the vengeance that allows Arthur to “keep faith with [his] God.”⁷⁹ Redolent of the earlier tradition of the *Historia Brittonum*, in which Arthur carries an image of the Virgin Mary on his shield, Geoffrey similarly turns Arthur's annihilation of the pagan Saxons into a victory as much for Christianity as for Britain. In fact, religious faith here helps define and bolster the coherence of the *patria*. Christ favors Arthurs early wars, reinforcing the legitimacy of his rule just as archbishops later recognize his supreme authority and rightful claim to the whole of Britain. Arthur gains victory in the Battle of Bath *auxiliante Deo* (§146), and the “holy” Archbishop Dubricius (*sanctus Dubricius; beatus vir* §147) exhorts Arthur's *uiri christiana* with a Crusader's zeal, declaring the defense of *patria* as a “victory that cleanses the soul,” death *pro patria* and *pro patimini* “a penance and absolution for all sins.” “Patriotic,” national fervor becomes Christlike: those who die willingly for their country follow in the footsteps of “Christ Himself, who did not disdain to lay down His life for His brothers.” The fervor of Dubricius' speech deserves quotation in full:

[Uiri christiana] pugnate pro patria uestra et mortem si superuenerit ultro pro eadem patimini. Ipsa enim uictoria est et anime remedium. Quicunque enim pro confratribus suis mortem inierit uiuam hostiam se prestat Deo Christumque insequi non ambigitur qui pro fratribus suis animam suam dignatus est ponere. Si aliquis igitur uestrum in hoc bello subierit mortem, sit ei mors ilia omnium delictorum suorum penitentia et ablution ... (§147)

You who have been marked with the cross of the Christian faith, fight for your

fatherland, and if you are killed suffer death willingly for your country's sake. That in itself is victory and a cleansing of the soul. Whoever suffers death for the sake of his brothers offers himself as a living sacrifice to God and follows with firm footsteps behind Christ Himself, who did not disdain to lay down His life for His brothers. If any one of you shall suffer death in this war, that death shall be to him as a penance and an absolution for all his sins.... (216)

Arthur responds unhesitatingly to the “benediction” of the “holy” Dubricius, arming himself as a soldier of Christ in leather jerkin, dragon-crested golden helmet, “peerless” sword Caliburn (*gladius optimus*), his spear, called Ron—*hec erat ardua lataque lancea, cladibus apta*, a long, broad blade right for slaughter⁸⁰—and circular shield Pridwen *in quo imago sancte Marie Dei genetricis impicta ipsum in memoriam ipsius sepiissime reuocabat*, “on which there was painted a likeness of the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, which forced [Arthur] to be thinking perpetually of her” (§147; 217). And indeed, furious that the battle dragged on without sure British victory,⁸¹ Arthur invokes the Virgins name as his battle cry. Only then does his warrior frenzy turn the tide of battle:

Abstracto ergo Caliburno gladio nomen sancte Marie proclamat et sese cito impetu infra densas hostium acies immisit. Quemcumque attingebat Deum inuocando solo ictu perimebat. Nee requieuit impetum suum facere donec quadringentos septuaginta uiros solo Caliburno gladio peremit. (§147)

Arthur drew his sword Caliburn, called upon the name of the Blessed Virgin, and rushed forward at full speed into the thickest ranks of the enemy. Every man whom he struck, calling upon God as he did so, he killed at a single blow. He did not slacken his onslaught until he had dispatched four hundred seventy men with his sword Caliburn. (217)

This is the *Historiis* first extended description of Arthur in combat, and thus in the Battle of Bath do Arthur's offensives take on the feel of a holy crusade for Britain, his battle fury a victory for a Christian *patria*, and with the rhetoric of Holy war Geoffrey co-opts for Arthur not only the martial savagery of Brutus but his divine favor as well.⁸²

Before initiating a second series of military campaigns, Arthur rebuilds the “half-burnt” churches that had been “razed” by the “fury of the pagans,” inviting back the monastic communities “driven out by the Saxon invasions.” He restores “hereditary rights” along with the dignity of the *patria*, and next punctuates the newly won civic order by “marr[ying] a woman called Guinevere”—“the most beautiful woman in the entire island,” 221 (§§151–2). This is the first of Geoffrey's very few (and all very terse) mentions of Arthur's queen; in marked contrast to the lust-driven unions of both Vortigern and Uther, Arthur's own marriage remains unembellished by the text, serving only as final act in a process of what Echard terms “setting the realm in order” (*ANLT* 46).

The following summer Arthur directs his armies beyond the island of Britain, conquering all of Ireland and defeating the people of Iceland—

subiugatis totius Hibernie; in Islandiam debellato populo subiugauit §153. As word of Arthur's strength spreads through the other islands, both the King of Gotland and the King of the Orkneys submit willingly, avoiding armed confrontation with payments of tribute and homage. It is, in fact, widespread dread of Arthur among *reges transmarinorum*—such *nimius timor* (great fear) and *mordacibus anxiati* (tormenting anxieties) of British attack and invasion—that soon inspires Arthur's ambitious campaign to conquer *totam Europam*, the whole of Europe. To this end Norway and Denmark are “savagely forced” to submit to Arthur's rule (§154; 222–3).⁸³

Roman Gaul, however, presents a greater challenge, and despite “wasting the countryside” and winning over much of the Gallic army with his generosity, Arthur is nonetheless stopped outside the garrisoned city of Paris. The Tribune Frollo, ruling Gaul in the name of the Emperor Leo, proposes to end the standoff by meeting Arthur in single combat. Delighted at the prospect of close combat—*placuitei uehementer*—Arthur agrees, and they bet the proverbial farm: *cut uictoriaproueniret alterius regnum obtineret*, “whichever was victorious should take the kingdom of the other” (§155; 224). Before a crowd of the two armies, Arthur quickly unseats Frollo but is unable to deliver a decisive blow before his own horse is slain beneath him. The warriors fight at length as equals until Frollo draws blood, the sight of which ignites Arthurs fierce battle fury, rousing him *ardentiori ira*: “he raised Caliburn in the air with all his strength and brought it down through Frollos helmet and so on to his head, which he cut into two halves,” 225 (*erecto totis uiribus Caliburno impressit eum per galeam infra caput Frollonis; quod in duos partes dissecuit* §155). Paris surrenders immediately.

From hand-to-hand victory in northern Gaul Arthur sets out to subdue the Poitevins by force, seizing *Aquitania* and ravaging Gascony *ferro et flamma* (with sword and fire). After nine years Arthur controls *totius Gallie partes* (all of the regions of Gaul). He settles the *regnum pace et lege* (peacefully and legally), and before returning to Britain he holds court in Paris to parcel out the former Roman provinces to his own men, of whom Geoffrey specifies only two: Bedevere the Cup-Bearer receives Normandy, the Seneschal Kay, Anjou (§155; 225). Thus through a series of military victories against the Roman Gauls, civic accomplishments, territorial expansion, and prolonged peace, Geoffrey introduces his Arthur as a more detailed and more complete version of the victorious warrior of chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*.

Geoffrey's peace-time Arthur, on the other hand, significantly amplifies the purely martial hero of earlier tradition, so that the fashion of *the fitmilia regis* as much as the pomp and ostentation of the *curia* (translated as “plenary court” by Thorpe) augment the portrait of the king, all but vying for narrative development with scenes of epic battle and hand-to-hand combat—“all but” because Geoffrey develops Arthur's court in only three chapters, and such description commands dramatically less narrative space than do scenes of

battle (§§ 154, 156–7; 222, 225–30). Yet they establish, in ways that strings of military victories alone cannot, the level of sophistication and refinement that marks the cultural superiority of Arthur's Britain. From the time of Britain's first extended peace, for instance, Arthur had developed in his household *tanta facetiae* that he inspired a widespread cult of imitation: ... *tantamque facetiam in domo sua habere ita ut emulationem longe manentibus populis ingereret* §154 (... [Arthur] developed such a code of courtliness in his household that he inspired peoples living far away to imitate him, 222). *Facetiae*, defined in classical dictionaries as “brilliant remarks” or witticisms—and loosely translated by Thorpe as “code of courtliness”—here involve more a standard of appearance than of social comportment. As the fashion trends of Arthur and his *milites*, such *facetiae* spur on the nobles of far-distant kingdoms (*ex longe regnis*): “even the man of noblest birth, once he was roused to rivalry, thought nothing at all of himself unless he wore his arms and dressed in the same way as Arthur's knights,” 222 (*Unde nobilissimus quisque incitatus nichili pendebat se nisi sese in induendo siue in arma ferendo ad modum militum Arturi haberet* §154).

Following the total conquest of Gaul, a similar focus on the fashion of political power gives color to Arthur's plenary court. Commemorating Pentecost as much as Arthur's military successes, the purpose of the gathering is to parade the crowned king before all of his subjects.⁸⁴ Conducted in the two great churches of Arthur's City of Legions, blessed by archbishops, and led by the kings of Albany, Cornwall, North Wales, and South Wales, the procession of *insignia regia* in fact displays Arthur as the head of both Church and *regnum*. The wealth and power of the *diadema regnum* are equally visible on Arthur's *familia* (§157; 229)—in the ermine robes of the Seneschal Kay (<K>*aius dapifer herminio ornatus*) and his thousand noblemen, for example, or in the miniver robes of the Cup-Bearer Bedevere (*Bedueru[s] pincern[a] uario*) Display reiterates in a very visible and tactile manner the already-established military preeminence of the realm: “Britain had reached such a standard of sophistication that it excelled all other kingdoms in its general affluence, the richness of its decorations, and the courteous behavior of its inhabitants,” 229 (*Ad tantum statum dignitatis Britannia tunc reducta erat quod co<pi>a diuiciarum, luxu ornamentorum, facecia incolarum cetera regna excellebat* § 157). Geoffrey seems even to suggest that the advance of heraldry in general marks the fashionable *dignitas* of Arthur's Britain, that sumptuous, colorful decorations distinguish the individual bravery of his *milites*: “every knight in the country who was in any way famed for his bravery wore livery and arms showing his own distinctive color,” 229 (*Quicumque uero famosus probitate miles in eadem erat unius colons uestibus atque armis utebatur* §157).

Yet the “sophisticated” fashion of Arthur's power, the *facetiae* of crowns, robes, and distinctive armor, are but show, mere ceremonial representations of military authority. Such display of wealth and pomp can only simulate what

Geoffrey prioritizes both narratively and descriptively as proper political power—military victory. It seems to be with cautionary skepticism, then, that Geoffrey identifies love as the underlying motive of knights' colors: “women of fashion often displayed the same colors. They scorned to give their love to any man who had not proved himself three times in battle,” 229 (*Facete etiam mulieres consimilia indumenta habentes nullius amorem habere dignabantur nisi tertio in milicia probatus esset* §157). Lumped together with playing dice and other *diversos ludos* (various games), Geoffrey labels such pursuits as *ludos campos* (battle-field games), *similachra* (imitations), impassioned performances inspired by flirtation: “The knights planned an imitation battle and competed together on horseback, while their womenfolk watched from the top of the city walls and aroused them to passionate excitement by their flirtatious behavior,” 230 (*mox milites simulachrum prelii sciendo equestrem ludum componunt; mulieres in edito murorum aspicientes in furiales amores flammas ioci more irritant* §157). Thus, in the showy display of a peace-time *curia*, the playful pursuits of mock soldiers distance Arthur's men from war-won glory.

For certainly, the *Historia* as a whole is a military account of the British past, and from the earliest chapters Geoffrey displays a tremendous gift for creating elaborate, extensive, and always varied descriptions of battle.⁸⁵ When it comes to Arthur's *curia regis*, however, Geoffrey's vivid imagination fails him. *Difficile est describere*, he claims, cutting short his account of the plenary procession into the City of Legions (§156; 228). In an ahistorical—non-martial—context, perhaps, Arthur's lavish ritual might indeed have merited lengthier elaboration. As it is, Arthur's display of wealth and ceremony, as well as the entertaining *ludos campos* of his knights, remains but brief narrative digression: “If I were to describe everything,” explains Geoffrey, “I should make this story far too long,” 229 (*Quern si omnino describere pergerem, nimian prolixitatem historie generarem* §157). War and conquest rather than regalian display ultimately drive the history, and though Geoffrey certainly offers the earliest portrait of what will become the “courtly” figurehead of later romance, his Arthurian Britain is foremost the domain of a martial sovereign and a mighty warrior class.

Though Geoffrey himself offers no direct criticism of the mock-battle entertainments of the *curia*, he creates a Duke of Cornwall wholly unhindered by such restraint. Cadur of Cornwall all but froths at the mouth at the latest chance to wage actual war, eager to shed the “cowardice” put on during a full five years of peace—five years of ease and sloth that have, in Cadur's estimation, assaulted the courage and bravery of all Britons. A Roman delegation interrupts Arthur's plenary court with demands for British tribute and submission to the Emperor Leo, who has understood Arthur's defiant aggression against his Gallic provinces not only as treasonous but as “tyrannical,” “criminal,” and “insane” (*tryannidis proteruita; iniustis actibus; uesania* §158). After the accusations are read before the court, Cadur, “who

was a merry man, burst out laughing,” 231 (*Cador dux Cornubie, ut erat Uti animi, in hunc sermonem cum risu coram rege solutus est* § 158); he was filled with joy (*leticid*) that God had thus provided the means to undo the years of damage wrought by peaceful life. Offering an entirely different perspective on the *curia* games described above—and perhaps the deliberate voice of Geoffrey’s condemnation of such entertainments—Cador’s speech to the king deserves full quotation:

‘Hucusque in timore fueram ne Britones longa pace quietos ocium quod ducunt ignavos faceret famamque militie qu<a> ceteris gentibus clariores censeantur in eis omnimodo deleat. Quippe ubi usus armorum uidetur abesse et alie et mulierum inflammationes ceteraque oblectamenta adesse, dubitandum non est ne id quod erat uirtutis, quod honoris, quod audacie, quod fame, ignavia commaculet. Fere nanque transacti sunt .v. anni ex quo predictis deliciis dediti exercitio maris caruimus. Deus igitur ne nos de<bilit>aret segnicia Romanos in hunc affectum induxit ut <in> pristinum statum nostram probitatem reducerent.’ (§158)

“Until now,” [Cador] said to the king, “I have been afraid that the life of ease which the Britons have been leading might make cowards of them and soften them up during this long spell of peace. Their reputation for bravery on the battle-field, for which they are more famous than any other people, might well have been completely lost to them. Indeed, when it is obvious that men are no longer using their weapons, but are instead playing at dice, burning up their strength with women and indulging in other gratifications of that sort, then without any doubt their bravery, honor, courage and good name all become tainted with cowardice. For the past five years or thereabouts we have thought of nothing but these follies, and we have had no battle experience. It is precisely to free us from this sloth that God has stirred up the resentment of the Romans, so that they may restore our courage to what it used to be in the old days.” (231–2)

Cador lowers the world of fashion and games—of follies, *deliciae*—to the realm of sin (*segnicia*, sloth), merrily urging a return to war as an antidote to the moral and physical weakness brought about by extended peace.

Auguselus, King of Albany, proves to be as giddy as Cador (and as “thirsty” for Roman blood—*sicio cruorem illorum*). “Such joy entered my heart as I cannot describe,” he effuses, (*tanta leticia animo illapsa est quantam nequeo in presentia exprimere*,) “overwhelmed with joy” (*gaudens admodum gaudeo*) at the prospect of quenching his bloodlust in the defense of his king and British *libertas* (234–5; §161). Wounds and death will be “sweet” (*dulcis*) so long as the Roman “half-men” (*semiuiros*) are crushed, looted, and defeated. King Hoel of Brittany naturalizes such anti-Roman sentiment, reminding Arthur and his men of their innate impulse to conquer Rome. In his words, “such a confrontation is longed for by all Britons,” 234 (*en congressus cunctis Britonibus desiderandus* §160). Hoel rouses the men to recognize in Arthur the one prophesied by the Sybil to follow Belinus and Constantine as the third man *ex Britannico genere* to topple the Roman Empire: “Do not the Sybilline Prophecies testify in verse that for the third time someone born of British blood shall seize the Empire of Rome?” (234; §160). Hoel’s speech

may be free of the others' "joy," but the combined effect is the same. Immediately on the heels of Arthurs lavish *curia*—in fact interrupting what in Geoffrey's words could have become a much lengthier portrait of peace-time life—the king's chief advisors present themselves as being happiest and most full of joy when anticipating the war they will wage against Britain's enemies.

The British are often described as fighting *unanimiter*, as one man. Even so, distinct personalities of Arthurs *familia* emerge during the conflict with Rome, and Geoffrey's narrative lingers for the first time on portraits of individual knights. Hyreglas, for one, Bedeveres nephew, cuts through the Romans "like a wild boar through a pack of hounds" (*uelut aper infra turmam canum*,) bellowing *maximo clamore* as he hacks a corpse to pieces to whip up the fury of his cavalry (252–3; § 172). Arthur's young nephew Gawain—"fearless in his courage," "bravest of all knights" (*semper recenti uirtute; audacissimus miles*)—exemplifies well the characteristic bravado of the Britons, instigating the first battle as a defiant retort to a Roman insult (254; §173). Sent as a messenger to Lucius Hiberius, Procurator of the Roman Republic, Gawain overhears Lucius' nephew mutter that "the Britons [are] better at boasting and making threats than they [are] at proving their courage and prowess on the battle-field," 241 (*Britones magis iactantia atque minis abundare quam audacia et probitate ualere* § 166). That remark wins Lucius' nephew a swift decapitation, and the British envoy, in full retreat, wreaks impressive destruction on the Romans. Gawain "cleaves" a man in two, "bidding him, when he got to hell, to tell Quintillianus, whom Gawain had just cut down in the camp, that this was why the Britons were so good at boasting and making threats," 242 (*Precepit etiam ei Quintilliano quem infra castra trucidauerat in <inferno> renuntiare Britones minis ac iactantia hoc modo abundare* §166). A very different character from the diplomat of later Arthurian romance, Geoffrey's warrior Gawain chooses slaughter over parley, turning the military defiance of political overlordship into a distinct mark of Britishness.

Arthur himself echoes Gawain's brand of epic taunt when he sends Lucius' corpse to the Roman Senate as the only kind of tribute ever to be expected from Britain (257; §176). Elsewhere, Arthur's insults goad his men to victory against the effeminate Roman halflings (*muliebres, semiuiri*,) and he exhorts the Britons with his famous sword (*Caliburno gladio optimo*) to remember their ancestors ('*mementote auorum uestrorum*') and their liberty ('*mementote libertatis uestre*'): "What the Devil are you doing, men?" he demands. "Are you letting these effeminate creatures slip away unhurt? Not one must escape alive! Not one must escape, I say!" 255 ('*Quid facitis, uiri? Ut quid muliebres permittitis illesos abire? Ne abscedat ullus uiuus! ... Ne abeat ullus uiuus, ne abeat*' §174). And few, in fact, do. Some are stripped and then trampled over with horses, some cut down in flight (244; §166). Others, "like so many women" (*muliebriter*,) surrender themselves to be bound into slavery. "All of this," Geoffrey assures us, "was ordained by divine

providence. Just as in times gone by the ancestors of the Romans had harassed the forefathers of the Britons with their unjust oppressions, so now [do] the Britons make every effort to protect their own freedom,” 256 (*Quod diuine potentie stabat loco cum et ueteres eorum priscis temporibus auos istorum inuisis inquietationibus infestassent; et isti tunc libertatem quam illi eisdem demere affectabant tueri instarent, abnegantes tributum quod ab ipsis iniuste exigebatur* §175). Just as Cadur of Cornwall imagined it would, the hand of God indeed impels Arthur and his men to avenge past Roman oppression with military victory. Thus is savage warrior might valorized as the defense of liberty and *patria*, and this highpoint of Geoffrey's version of British history graced by divine providence.

As we know, the highpoint is short lived, and already by the time Arthur sends Lucius's body back to Rome, the Britons have lost Bedevere, Kay, and scores of others (§§171, 167, 173; 252, 246, 253). Back in Britain to fight against Mordred—“infamous traitor” (*sceleratissimus proditor*) and “Perjurer” (*Periurus*)—and his *diversos barbaros*, his *latrones*, civil war claims Augustus of Albany, Gawain, and Ywein, whom Geoffrey names only in death (§§177, 178; 258, 259, 260). Thousands die on each side, decimating the island and leaving it vulnerable to the return of the Saxons and to their eventual political take-over. Arthur, though he does not die in the *Historia* (he is “carried off to the Isle of Avalon” for medical treatment, 261), nonetheless receives what Geoffrey describes as a deadly wound: *Set et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illine ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis ...* (§178). The crown of Britain passes to Constantine, the son of Cadur of Cornwall, and within some twenty pages of Thorpe's translation the island of Britain has surrendered sovereignty to its first Saxon king, having fallen from the height of Arthur's *curia* and near-conquest of Rome into a state of frequent civil war, famine, plague, mass exodus, and foreign domination. Yet as the narrative pattern and rhythm of British history has shown all along, such a desperate state is ripe for a cyclic upswing, and the *Historia* concludes not so much with a somber sense of loss as with the echo of the *vox angelica* and a powerful presentiment of the very near restoration of British-Welsh autonomy.

To be sure, Geoffrey's is the portrait of King Arthur and of a whole, united Arthurian Britain to which all subsequent Arthuriana in some way responds, and his new combination of conquering warrior-chieftain and domestic cultural trendsetter represents not only the most powerful Arthur in literature but also the single most influential source for the developing genre of romance. What becomes clear in his extended emphasis on *opatRIA* and a *regnum* unified by a single dynamic warrior-king is that Geoffrey creates this Arthur to identify and define his *Britones* as a distinct and sovereign, self-ruled group.⁸⁶ Such a national, or what Susan Reynolds has preferred to call “regnal” (381, 382n31), historiography assuredly accommodates myriad political interpretations, and Geoffrey's Arthur proved to be equally appealing

and accessible to poets from both sides of the Channel as to Anglo-Norman rulers and Welshmen hopeful for the prophesied resurgence of a Britain reunited by a British-Welsh king. As mentioned earlier, this politicization of King Arthur elicited immediate response in several languages, and while Henry II Planta-genet claimed Geoffrey's Arthur as a legal and historical precedent for his own conquests in Ireland and Scotland, his son Richard I adopted as his both Caliburn and the dragon banner, appropriating for a Francophone ruling dynasty symbols of native insular sovereignty.

It is perhaps such blatant Anglo-Norman appropriation of Geoffrey's British king that inspires the reaction crystallized in the œuvre of Chrétien de Troyes and maintained in the slightly later prose tales of Welsh romancers. Whatever the impetus, Chrétien systematically rewrites the Galfridian King Arthur, weakening beyond recognition the newly adopted Plantagenet icon of insular sovereignty. The following chapters thus turn to questions of conquest and national cultural production, looking first at the effect of ascendant Norman influence on both continental and insular politics.

PART II

Conquest and National Cultural Production

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, France and Wales were lands of multiple and rival principalities, both characterized by dynastic infighting. Moreover, northern French principalities such as Normandy, Flanders, and Champagne, like Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth in Wales, prized poets in their courts, encouraging with comparable practices of reward and support the cultural explosion that included the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, and, perhaps less than fifty years later, the analogous Welsh Arthurian tales.¹ But complicating such political and cultural similarities is what Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd have called the question of “subject-position,” and an exploration of the successive conquests that distanced Welsh culture from that of the *langue d’oil* areas of both Britain and continental France becomes “the central task of the theory of minority discourse” (9).² By the late eleventh century, for instance, continental princes of northern France were enjoying the height of regalian powers.³ In contrast, newly-won Norman military overlordship represented for the Welsh the latest foreign occupation to be underpinned by both ethnic bias and colonial settlement (e.g., Davies, “Buchedd” esp 174–5). In the words of the *Gesta Stephani*, Wales bred “men of an animal type” (*hominum nutrix bestialium*), “untamed savages” (*Walensium barbariem*) who were “perseveringly civilized” and “vigorously subdued” by the Norman conquest: [*Normanni*] *propriis incolis viriliter edomitis, constanter excoluere* 14–15; 172–3. Waves of Norman, Flemish, Breton, and Saxon immigration into central and southern Wales displaced native inhabitants and bolstered the foreign hold secured over Ceredigion, Dyfed, Ystrad Tywi, Pembroke, Gower, and Morgannwg.⁴ By the end of the reign of Henry I in 1135, eastern portions of Gwynedd were under Norman control, and punitive expeditions had forced the dynasties of Powys and Gwynedd to acknowledge their client status to the Anglo-Norman Crown: the Wales of 1135 could indeed be thought of as “a second England.”⁵ Thus, unlike the power struggles fought between the northern principalities of continental France, the political fragmentation of Wales was exploited not only internally but externally by the aggressively expansionist and colonial policies of foreign Anglo-Norman conquerors.

This is not to suggest that the continent remained wholly untouched by the conquest that turned Norman dukes into English kings and Normandy into “the southern part of a trans-Channel kingdom” (Hollister 216). Princely

autonomy from the Capetian king was indeed curtailed as a result of Norman expansion. Within roughly eighty years of 1066, control over some of the largest western and northern principalities—the duchies of Aquitaine and Maine, and the counties of the Loire controlled by Anjou and Normandy—had fallen into the hands of one man, Henry of Anjou, King of England, “destroying” the continental “system of medium-sized principalities” that had come to determine the “political, economic, cultural, and religious achievements of France” (Werner, “Kingdom” 263). What is more, Henry II became the first crowned king of England to render homage to a king of France, a “precedent-shattering” submission to a fellow monarch that strategically gained the security of Capetian suzerainty for all of his continental holdings (Hollister 235–42). In thus “abandoning” a cross-Channel *regnum* in favor of an empire of confederated states, Henry launched a trend that invited—even required—the interference of the French king into dynastic politics.⁶ Karl Ferdinand Werner has in fact dated the process of what he terms the “reunification” of the French crown to the mid twelfth-century rise of Angevin supremacy, crediting the accumulated power of Henry II with forcing his rival princes to follow suit in seeking the protection of the Capetian king (“Kingdom” 264).⁷ Henry II was certainly not the only factor effecting tremendous political change in twelfth-century France, and Hollister for one has rightly attributed the reign of Louis VI with a role in paving the way to such royal “re-vitalization” (223). Yet the superior wealth, influence, and territorial reach of the Angevin kings of England undeniably competed and interfered with continental princely interests, contributing to a redistribution of comital and ducal power that subordinated the great princes to the Capetian monarchy and enabled the “unbelievably rapid triumph” of Philip Augustus (Werner, “Kingdom” 246).⁸ Thus, though far from the exclusive catalyst of political change, it is in light of Norman and Angevin expansion that [Part III](#) of this book will later seek to contextualize Arthurian romance. The eleventh-century conquest that colonized Wales and turned Norman dukes into English kings ultimately forged Henry II's cross-Channel empire while laying the groundwork for the territorial “augmentation” of Philip II's Capetian restoration.⁹ To be sure, continental subjection to such Anglo-Norman influence lacked much of the linguistic, cultural, legal, territorial, military, and colonial pressure exerted on Wales, and a legacy of foreign conquest importantly distinguishes the culture of medieval Wales from that of northern France. But northern French princes could nonetheless trace in part the decline of their political independence and a renewed reliance on the Capetian king to the ascendancy of Henry of Anjou. Before turning to the romances, then, Part II takes a brief look at the separate socio-political contexts that pit princely courts, and the romance corpora they patronized, against the political reality of dual contemporary kingships. On the one hand increasing Capetian centralization, the ambiguous and, at the time of Chrétien de Troyes as yet unfulfilled, potential for a redefined and greatly strengthened

continental monarchy. On the other hand Angevin dominion and the literary image of aggressive sovereignty that it embraced: what was likely, at least in part, seen as the Anglo-French—if not Plantagenet—King Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Chapter Three

Politics and Patronage in Northern France

Though the balance of power would change decisively at the turn of the thirteenth century, as it indeed had been steadily turning since the reign of Louis VI, in the roughly thirty-year *floruit* of Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1160–1191),¹ the counts of the northern French principalities of Champagne, Flanders, and Anjou were wealthy, powerful vassals of two comparatively weak kings of France, Louis VII (1137–1180) and his son, Philip II (1179–1223).² Forming what R. Howard Bloch has termed a “fiercely independent aristocracy” (*MFL* 197), these “regal princes” were considered “together with kings the ruling elite of Europe” (Bisson, “Princely Nobility” 101). Ruling over autonomous *regna* from as early as the ninth century,³ they claimed a sovereign right to wage private war. Between them they controlled the Great Fairs of Champagne,⁴ the textile industry of Flanders, and the far-reaching cross-Channel Angevin empire. Peers of the realm along with the count of Toulouse and the imperial duke of Burgundy, they were three of the five most powerful princes in France next to the king, who before 1200 exercised only nominal supremacy. Though Henry of Anjou became without doubt the richest and most powerful vassal of the Capetian monarchy, the counts of Champagne and Flanders likewise exceeded their sovereign in economic and military resources; all three controlled lands significantly more extensive than the royal domain.⁵ Henry of Anjou, Henry the Liberal of Troyes, and Philippe of Flanders inherited principalities far superior to the royal domain in administrative innovation.⁶ Their courts moreover commissioned a flourishing of cultural production, notably ignoring the clerical efforts to repress literary patronage so adhered to by successive Capetian kings.⁷ As magnates, they flaunted their self-rule in feudal and for-profit ventures involving enemies of France: all three served as vassals to the emperor of Germany, Frederick I Barbarossa.⁸ Philippe of Flanders maintained close ties with England, ensuring for his county the commercial flow of British wool that stimulated competition in textile production with the duchy of Normandy (Baldwin, *GPA* 8; Spiegel 24).⁹ Though vassals of the Capetian king, these lord-princes enjoyed autonomous wealth and territorial sovereignty, set cultural standards, and ruled their lands with immunity from royal intervention.¹⁰ In the time of Chrétien de Troyes, in other words, the royal domain of France was not only sandwiched between the larger empires of Germany and England but surrounded by the superior administrative

organization of stronger, wealthier, self-serving vassals.

Yet the startlingly rapid rise and long-lasting power of Henry of Anjou served to stem the fiercely independent regality exercised by the northern French *principes* of Champagne and Flanders, impelling them against recent tradition toward the increased centralization of the kingdom. When at Easter of 1152 Louis VII divorced Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine,¹¹ a young Henry of Anjou leapt at the opportunity, and by Pentecost he had married the scandal-ridden ex-wife of the French king to become Duke of Aquitaine, a political alliance that transferred lordship of over a third of west Francia from the royal domain to Anjou.¹² In that same year Henry became Duke of Normandy—and the first of that title to render homage in Paris rather than *en marche* (Hollister 238). In 1153, the peace treaty at Winchester recognized Henry as King Stephen's heir, divesting of England both Stephen's son and the dynasty of Blois-Champagne in favor of an Angevin king. Finally, in 1154, the sixteen-year-old Henry became King of England, launching a thirty-five year reign that consolidated an insular realm with ducal and comital holdings stretching from Normandy to the Pyrenees. It was not merely that Henry's territorial acquisitions upset the balance of princely power in northern France. Even more significantly, he was prepared both to recognize and manipulate the sovereignty of the Capetian king, increasing his security against rival continental princes with the frequent performance of homage.¹³ Thus shrewdly managing the vastness of his continental holdings, Henry II defined and enforced a degree of lordship within his Anglo-Norman empire that Philip Augustus would not achieve until the second half of his forty-four year reign.

The rise of Henry II did much to change the political habits of two great northern dynasties, and though neither Champagne nor Flanders relinquished commercial or administrative autonomy, they both sought new relationships with the monarchy. One of the first independent acts of Henry the Liberal as count of Champagne was to contract in 1153a marriage engagement between himself and the eldest daughter of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine (Benton, "Court" 5–6).¹⁴ This agreement signaled a dramatic shift in Champagnois politics, traditionally more accustomed to opposing the Capetian monarchy than to seeking its alliance. Indeed, Henry's father, Thibaut II—described by Michel Bur as "plus anglo-normand que français" (125)—was not only the closest male heir to the English throne, but he unfailingly took the side of his uncle, King Henry I of England, in the frequent wars waged against the French king, Louis VI (Baldwin, *GPA* 9; Bur 125).¹⁵ Henry inherited from Thibaut an independent, exceedingly well-governed county, cataloguing in 1172 some 1900 highborn castellans and their agents in his service (Baldwin, *GPA* 9).¹⁶ He partitioned the county, distributing Blois-Chartres and Sancerre to his brothers Thibaut and Stephen, and against tradition he claimed Troyes and Meaux for himself, thus realigning the center of Champagne from Blois to Troyes, his most lucrative fief.¹⁷ With Meaux, Troyes, Blois, and Chartres, the house of Champagne held lands that

surrounded the royal domain on the east, south, and southwest, geography that before the rise of Anjou had contributed to making the Champagne family a traditional enemy of the monarchy.

Yet throughout the 1150s and 1160s alliances and royal favor continued to build such ties with the French monarchy that the house of Champagne provided the highest officials and “most visible” magnates of the royal *conseil* (Baldwin, *GPA* 31,32). Following the marriage arrangement of 1153 between Henry the Liberal and the princess Marie,¹⁸ Henry's brother Thibaut of Blois became royal seneschal in 1154, a post he retained until his death at the siege of Acre in 1191.¹⁹ Louis VII married Adèle of Champagne in 1160, guaranteeing the continued inside influence of her family at the royal court and ensuring an avuncular tie between the future king Philip Augustus and Adele's brothers.²⁰ Thibaut of Blois, already royal seneschal, married another of the king's daughters by Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1164. The youngest Champagne brother, Guillaume “aux blanches mains,” was promoted to the archbishopric of Reims in 1176, and came to be regarded by Philip Augustus as the “vigilant eye of his counsels and the right hand of his affairs” (cited by Baldwin, *GPA* 32).²¹ We are far here from the low point of Capetian power in the late eleventh century, when “the great territorial princes were almost never at the king's court, and many of them did not bother to do him homage” (Hollister 223). For despite the wealth and independence of Champagne, Henry the Liberal reversed the political trends of his father and looked to France for additional strength. Though he himself died in 1181, Thibaut, Guillaume, and Adele lived into the final decade of the century as privileged and trusted councilors, negotiators, and administrators of Philip II Augustus.²²

Concurrent with the ascendancy of Champagne at the Capetian court, Philippe of Alsace, count of Flanders from 1168 to 1191—praised by Chrétien de Troyes as *le plus preudomel Qui soit en l'empire de Rome* (the noblest man in the Empire of Rome, *Perceval* 11–12)—controlled what John Baldwin has described as the richest, best-governed principality in the kingdom. The “brilliance of his rule,” according to Gabrielle Spiegel, set the administrative precedent for what Philip Augustus would soon accomplish in France (29). More compact than its sprawling neighbor to the south, Flanders accommodated a much more regimented administrative division into castellanies than did Champagne. In fact, most castles remained in the hands of the count. Philippe's court not only claimed the earliest chancery among the lay princes of France, but his expert use of *baillis*, or salaried officials, bypassed and further limited the power of his local castellans (Baldwin, *GPA* 8).²³ Philippe thus exerted “unusual” authority over his county, consolidating his control with administrative organization. Moreover, his marriage in 1164 gave him possession of Vermandois, Amiens, and Valois, lands threateningly close to Paris and coveted by the monarchy. Because of the power he wielded over his county, the revenues he earned from cloth-weaving industries, and the threat he could pose to the northern lands of France, Philippe of Alsace in the

mid 1160s “seriously contended for hegemony over northwestern France” (Baldwin, *GPA* 8).²⁴

But just as Champagne took every opportunity to install a dynastic camp at the royal court, so did Flanders seek to forge new ties with France, forming what would prove to be the contentious and duplicitous Franco-Flemish “alliance” well manipulated by both sides (Spiegel 31–52). Philippe of Alsace in fact displaced Champagne's influence at court late in Louis VII's reign, and he won a prominent role in Philip II's coronation of 1179, where he carried Philip's sword and served at the feast that followed. Soon after, enjoying what Baldwin deemed “his most striking success” (*GPA* 15), Count Philippe secured the marriage of his niece to the newly-crowned king, gaining via a Flemish queen the inside influence previously enjoyed by Champagne during the marriage of Louis VII and Adèle. The ascendancy of Flanders was short-lived, however, and interrupted by frequent dispute over the succession of Vermandois²⁵ as well as by the intervention of Henry II of England that (in 1180) drove Philippe to the first of many armed conflicts against Philip Augustus.²⁶ Relations between France and Flanders were sporadically repaired before Philippe's death at Acre in 1191, and though the count never significantly challenged the house of Champagne for influence at the French court, he nonetheless vied for power in “a series of fateful gambles” with the Capetian monarchy.²⁷ Such increased and steady recourse to the French king, “irreversibly” tipping the balance of sovereign authority from aristocracy to monarchy (Spiegel 17), can in part be credited to the unprecedented rise to power in continental politics of King Henry II of England.

As the great princes aligned themselves with their king over the second half of the twelfth century they inadvertently set the groundwork for increased royal centralization, and princely anxiety over increasingly assertive royal hegemony ultimately found expression in the early thirteenth-century appearance of the first vernacular prose histories.²⁸ *The floruit* of Chrétien de Troyes indeed predates the crises of the turn of the century: the dissolution of the Angevin empire²⁹ and the concerted efforts to extend and detail royal authority that characterize the latter half of Philip Augustus' reign in France.³⁰ His was nonetheless a time of diminishing aristocratic independence. Starting with Henry of Anjou—who enthusiastically embraced the ducal and comital titles eschewed by the three previous Anglo-Norman kings³¹—the political landscape of northern France experienced the decline of princely *regna*, and Henry of Champagne as well as Philippe of Flanders followed Angevin suit in forfeiting to the Capetian monarchy the “hawkish ideals” once enjoyed by their predecessors (R. H. Bloch, *MFL* 197). This, then, was as much a time of baronial limitation and centralizing monarchy as it was a period of competition for strength and influence among the nobility of still largely self-ruling principalities. Indeed, Bloch has maintained that ideological differences within the French aristocracy—a tension between “high nobility and squireen”—were at this historical moment ultimately “less important than the

ideological gulf separating both from the ambitions of monarchy” (MFL 222). Thomas Bisson supports this view, arguing that the “typical struggle” of the twelfth century opposed knights and kings (“Feudal Revolution” 40–1; opposing view in S. White 208–9). Chrétien’s historical, Capetian models of local kingship may not yet have raised the same anxious, uneasy questions about royal power as did the far more interventionist policies and strategies of Henry II. Even so, creating a King Arthur who praises rather than curtails the combative excursions of his chief knights, Chrétien’s romances likely assuaged his ducal and comital audiences with the fictional ideals of chivalric combat and adventure (Bloch, MFL 220–21).

Romance kingship not only sanctions the aggressive ambition that distinguishes the heroic successes of an Erec or an Yvain. It formulates the ideology of a unified, homogeneous, noble society, with king and warrior-barony made equals by the tenets of Arthur’s Round Table.³² As the great principalities of Champagne and Flanders, as well as the Capetian monarchy, competed for authority amongst themselves and against Anjou’s Anglo-Norman empire, the romance illusion of aristocratic autonomy and overall social unity veils the social and political changes of the late twelfth century that pitted kings and their efforts to govern against the “militant lordship” of knights (Bisson, “Feudal Revolution” 36, 40–1).

Contrary to favoring knights or seigneurial nobility, aspects of Chrétien’s initial romances have been shown to reflect royal, perhaps even Plantagenet interests, particularly the formidable warrior King Arthur of *Cligés*.³³ Yet his final three romances,³⁴ written in the service of the great comital houses of Champagne and Flanders, intensify an image of weakened regalian authority and render the nature of kingship ambiguous. It is precisely in the progressively declining, criticized, and marginalized figure of Chrétien’s King Arthur that continental cultural production seems to gloss over aristocratic unease about both the uncertain course of Capetian centralization as well as the encroaching dominance of King Henry of England.³⁵

That the ubiquitous Henry II would have provided a model or even a patron for the Champagnois poet is not surprising. Scholars have in fact linked much of what Ian Short has deemed the “precocity” of the twelfth-century insular “vernacularization of culture” to Henry II’s political ambition, and the disparate collection of material addressed directly to him certainly emphasizes his legal, bureaucratic, and geographic hold over all of Britain and the west of France (“Patrons” 230, 231).³⁶ Of the nearly forty works in French and Latin dedicated to or written for Henry Plantagenet, fifteen are historical narratives—many, like Wace’s unfinished *Roman de Ron*, offering genealogical accounts that justify Norman claims to England.³⁷ Glanvill’s treatise on law (*Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie*) and the administrative hand-book attributed to the royal treasurer Richard Fitz Nigel (*Dialogus de Scaccario*, the Course of the Exchequer) praise the king’s government and catalogue in minute detail his ever-increasing and

centralizing royal authority. The prolific ethnography and miscellany of Henry's chaplains Gerald of Wales and Peter of Blois,³⁸ as well as Jordan Fantosme's eyewitness (and "surprisingly accurate") account known as the *Chronique de la guerre entre les Anglois et les Ecosais* (xviii),³⁹ insist on the cultural and military supremacy of Henry over Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as over his bishops and his rebellious sons. Though not the commissioned work of members of the *curia*, the *Lais* of Marie de France, presented *en l'onur* of her *nobles reis*,⁴⁰ in addition to *romans antiques* that reprised classical sagas of nation-building, likewise contributed to "the high point of royal patronage, interest, and influence" that constituted Henry's twelfth-century Angevin court (Blacker, "Lageste"387).⁴¹

Risking a tendency to "exaggerate" Henry's role in such literary proliferation,⁴² and turning away from the lack of direct historical evidence to rely instead on textual detail, scholars have surmised a link between Chrétien's earliest, undedicated romances—*Erec et Enide* and *Cligès*—and what may have been the poet's early professional association with the Plantagenet court (e.g. Duggan 8–23). Read from this perspective, Erec's coronation during Arthur's Christmas court in Nantes can appear to be a deliberate recollection of the Christmas court held in that city by Henry II (6501–6878),⁴³ when in 1169 he celebrated the three-year-old betrothal of his third son Geoffrey to Constance of Brittany. Though the couple did not marry until 1181, Geoffrey received homage from the Breton barons in Nantes, and Henry thus gained through this marriage arrangement the feudal submission that successive military campaigns had failed to achieve.⁴⁴ Duggan has even suggested that, by staging the consolidation of Plantagenet power in Brittany, *Erec et Enide* might have made an appropriate gift for the young couple Constance and Geoffrey—a couple that later named their only son Arthur (Duggan 12). Moreover, as if using Arthur's vast dominion to emphasize the reach of Henry's influence, *Erec* deletes the existence of the French monarchy from its literary fiction: the guest list at Erec's coronation consists exclusively of vassals holding land under Henry's actual, material suzerainty.⁴⁵ Two historical figures mentioned in the poem likewise flaunt Henry's inherited authority and influence over Wales and its princes. *Bruianz des Illes* (Brian fitz Count, dead c. 1150), a favorite of Henry I, acquired the lordship of Abergavenny by royal gift in 1119 and became a leading Norman magnate of Wales. And *Yvain de Cavalïot* (Owein Cyfeiliog ap Gruffudd, dead 1197), prominent poet-prince of Powys and, according to Gerald of Wales, a "close friend" of the king for "frequently opposing] the plans of his own leaders and espousing] the cause of Henry II King of the English."⁴⁶ Finally, Arthur's ceremonial thrones are adorned *de liepart* (with leopards, 6666), the heraldic animal of the kings of England. Are such provocative details designed with foresight to flatter the English king and echo his accomplishments? Does a romance like *Erec* then reflect a patronage relationship linking the Champenois poet to Henry II? Impossible to know—the precise nature of a

Plantagenet connection, if any, cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the King Arthur and Erec of Chrétien's first romance exercise a familiar and arguably recognizable hegemony over both Brittany and Wales.

According to similar arguments that Chrétien used his romances to praise and acknowledge Plantagenet power, the Arthurian Britain of *Cligés* can resemble a calculated replica of Henry II's empire, offering more overt praise to the English king than *Erec* and proving unique in Chrétien's corpus for its portrayal of a militarily powerful and active King Arthur. Far from a past Arthur destined eventually to return, the Arthur of *Cligés* rules a current and recognizable cross-Channel realm, subtly replacing the model of Geoffrey's mythic hero-king with a mirror image of Henry II. To be sure, Peter of Blois and Gerald of Wales both mock the foolish gullibility of Britons who yet *expectant Arturum*,⁴⁷ and *Cligés* seems to accommodate political spin of the time that painted Henry as both a descendent and a new version of Arthur. Styling himself ruler of a reunited Britain, Henry proved to be keenly interested in replacing "that most renowned King of the Britons" (Gerald of Wales 281),⁴⁸ and in the mid 1170s Henry was intent on reasserting and specifying his sovereign authority over Scotland, Ireland, and Wales (Davies, *Conquest* 290–92).

If, however, the primary aim of Chrétien's earliest Arthurian fictions was to solicit Plantagenet favor and patronage, it seems unlikely that both *Erec* and *Cligés* would entirely omit mention of the king and fail to provide the direct praise with which the poet later identifies the patrons of *Lancelot* and *Perceval*—an omission perhaps especially unlikely in light of Henry's surprising reputation for parsimony when it came to remunerating authors and poets. Though Wace, for instance, was rewarded for his *Roman de Brut* with a cathedral prebend in Bayeux,⁴⁹ he complains later in the *Roman de Rou* of unfulfilled promises: *Mult me dona, plus mepramist/ E se il tot done m'eustl Co qu'il me pramist, mierz me Just* (Much he gave me, more did he promise me, and if he had given me all he had promised, better off would I be, 11488–490). Gerald of Wales was evidently offered no material reward for his work. In contradistinction to the image of Henry's court as a thriving literary center, Gerald laments that the king "had little or no interest in literature," declaring that he "completely wasted [his] time when [he] wrote [his] *Topography of Ireland* for Henry II, King of the English" (68, 67). Again, compelling details aside, we can only speculate as to Chrétien's intended audience and his prospective patron (s) for *Erec* and *Cligés*. What we know for certain is that Chrétien's later career tied him to Henry II's chief continental rivals, and that when writing for Champagne and Flanders his portrait of Arthurian rule became increasingly ambiguous and degenerated markedly.

Later in his career Chrétien advertised a professional affiliation to the princely courts of Champagne and Flanders, identifying the patrons of his final two romances as Marie, *ma dame de Chanpaigne*, and Philippe of Alsace, Count of Flanders. Marie provided the *matiere* (matter) and *san*

(meaning) of *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (c. 1181–1187);⁵⁰ and Chrétien praised Philippe, dedicatee of the unfinished *Roman de Perceval, ou le conte du grail* (c. 1190),⁵¹ as *le plus preudomel Qui soit en l'empire de Rome* (the noblest man in the Holy Roman Empire).⁵² Marie and Philippe were both related to the Capetian king Philip Augustus, Marie by blood and Philippe by marriage. They were second cousins (via Philippe's wife, Elizabeth of Vermandois), and as shown in the first part of this chapter they represented two politically powerful northern families that in the latter half of the twelfth century sought to offset the dominance of Henry of Anjou by joining forces with the Capetian monarchy. Marie, Capetian princess in her own right as daughter of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine, symbolized an era of mutually beneficial Franco-Champenois alliance, and her marriage to Henry the Liberal neutralized or at least countered the Capetian loss of Aquitaine to her step-father, Henry of Anjou. Marie thus married into the Champagne dynasty when it was still flush from the loss to Anjou of the kingdom of England,⁵³ and some twenty years later, as a widow, she commissioned *Lancelot*, the romance that vies with *Perceval* for the distinction of being Chrétien's most scathing portrait of King Arthur.

Marie, who named her fourth child Scholastique (Benton, “Court” 6), shared her husband's interest in patronizing literature and continued to commission works after his death in 1181.⁵⁴ She seemed to have a particular interest in romantic fiction. She has long been linked to so-called “love courts,” thanks largely to her chaplain Andreas, who “drew her into the game of fiction” by describing her in his *On Love (De amore*, c. 1184–1186) not only as presiding over such a court but as decreeing the incompatibility of love and marriage (Bk II, ch XVII).⁵⁵ Chrétien similarly “draws” Marie into his own fiction (Bruckner, *Shaping* 86), crediting her with providing the (adulterous) subject matter of *Lancelot*. The countess had previously requested a translation of the forty-fourth Psalm (the *Eructavit*); whether or not she specifically requested the anonymous poet's emphasis on love and joy, the style of the *Eructavit* in Benton's estimation “brings the vocabulary and phrasing of the poem close to that of secular love literature” (“Court” 18). And yet her apparent interest in *ars amoris*, fueled jointly by troubadour poetry and Andreas Capellanus, discernable in the *Eructavit* and featured in *Lancelot*, does not preclude from the literature of Marie's court an equal interest in the contemporary politics of northern France. Her court shared with local Cistercian libraries the second largest continental collection of manuscripts of Geoffrey's *Historia* (M. L. Warren, *History* 172; Crick *HRB IV* 210–13). She requested at least one “polite and conventional” work from the Champagnois poet Gace Brulé (Benton, “Court” 19), thus sharing through patronage the poet of both Philip Augustus and her half-brother, Geoffrey of Brittany (Duggan 10).⁵⁶ (Marie, incidentally, was evidently well disposed toward her half-brother Geoffrey, in whose memory she donated an annual revenue to the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris.) Another Plantagenet half-

brother, Richard I, esteemed her enough to address to her his captivity poem of the mid 1190s (*Rotouenge de la Captivité*),⁵⁷ as if he considered her court as much a political hub as a flourishing cultural center. Patronage of the romance of *Lancelot*, in other words, should not be reduced to a chic penchant for *ars amoris*. The breadth of Marie's literary patronage suggests a court well attuned to the vagaries of both Plantagenet and Capetian politics, and though the adultery theme was certainly in vogue, it should not obscure equal interest in Chrétien's emphasis on distant, hands-off kingship.

While Champagne enjoyed significant, if frequently conflictual, royal favor, Philippe of Flanders persistently opposed the French king until 1185, waging sporadic war against the monarchy over the disputed territories of Vermandois. Shortly after Marie became a widow, Philippe of Flanders sought a marriage alliance that would join Champagne and Flanders. The marriage never materialized, but it is following this courtship that Chrétien began to write for his second patron, likely sometime during the second half of the 1180s. The timing of Chrétien's employ by Flanders thus coincided with a brief respite in the period of Franco-Flemish conflict, *Perceval* dating to a period Stanger has described as Philippe's "greatest political influence, and the time when he was held in the highest esteem" (215).

Even more so than *Lancelot*, *Perceval* highlights the dissolution of Arthur's court and realm. The tale not only implies disaffection and treachery from Gauvain, who late in the poem becomes embroiled in an apparent plot to usurp Arthur's realm.⁵⁸ But *Perceval* also chronicles and foregrounds the awkward social ignorance of Arthur's latest champion, a bumbling and self-absorbed Welsh would-be knight. The poem seriously undermines the heroism of King Arthur and his court, and it portrays the Welsh in such a way as to be biting insult to any ruler forced to populate his retinue with them. Presuming the possibility of a contemporary model behind Chrétien's version of kingship, it was Henry II who proved unable to subdue the Welsh definitively during his reign: a Flemish army formed part of an aborted expedition against an alliance of Welsh princes in 1165, and the Flemish nobility would have been aware of Henry's subsequent "détente" with the Lord Rhys, Owain Gwynedd, and other far-from-bumbling Welshmen—a protracted peace that marked an abrupt change in Henry's Welsh policy, lasting from the early 1170s until the end of his reign in 1189. I am not suggesting that Philippe of Flanders commissioned an explicitly anti-Plantagenet romance—no more so than I was earlier suggesting that Chrétien must have been Henry II's patron poet. But I do think that the change in Chrétien's Arthur merits contextualization, and Henry II himself encouraged a parallel between his kingship and that of the legendary Arthur. *Perceval* provides portraits very different from those of Arthur and the Welsh in *Erec* and *Cligés*:: whereas the earlier romances can be seen to echo the conquest and distribution of Welsh land that characterized the first two decades of Henry's rule, Chrétien's final work mocks the king as incapable of defending his court

from hostile incursion, be it the physical violence of the Vermillion Knight or the cultural invasion of Perceval *li galois*. The latter years of Chrétien's career, though spanning a decade in northern France of what John Baldwin has termed "shifting alliances," coincide with periods of Franco-Champenois and Franco-Flemish collaboration.⁵⁹ Chrétien's progressively inactive literary king, as well as the presumed unity of his social world, alleviates the contemporary political reality of increasingly assertive monarchy.

Though Chrétien's entire romance corpus structurally glosses over tension brewing within the world of his aristocratic patrons—creating a unifying King Arthur and his Round Table of free-roaming adventurers—serious criticism of sovereign authority clearly characterizes these poems. It is interesting that neither Marie's blood tie nor Philippe's repaired political tie to the Capetian monarchy restricted Chrétien's negative portrait of a distant, defenseless, cuckolded king, and the poet evidently had no fear of incurring Capetian anger with his version of Arthur. Indeed, content with the lineage of their own iconic king—Charlemagne—the Capetians never competed for a cultural claim to the legendary British king. Perhaps the French nobility as well as the French monarch enjoyed Chrétien's Arthur—certainly the Arthur of *Lancelot* and *Perceval*—as a mocking caricature of the descent claimed by the rival Plantagenet dynasty. The humorously exaggerated inactivity of King Arthur, as well as the precariousness of his suzerainty and the vulnerability of his realm, would have provided trenchant, partisan entertainment to an aristocratic elite and to a monarchy that made no claim to the legendary warrior. Britain's Arthur was not to be confused or compared with *Carles li reis, nostre empereres magnes* (King Charles, our great emperor), the paradigmatic French emperor glorified from the opening line of the *Chanson de Roland* and embraced as a cultural icon by Capetian monarchs.⁶⁰ In this respect, it is in the figure of the king and in the authority of centralized kingship that Chrétien's later romances depart significantly not only from *Erec* and *Cligés* but from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and contemporary French epic.⁶¹ Chrétien's adulteration of Geoffrey of Monmouth's great British king, commissioned by the continental houses of Champagne and Flanders, gives to early Arthurian romance some of the political intensity contextualized in [chapters 5 and 6](#), fueling his verse narratives with an ironic treatment of kingship in general but also of insular supremacy. It is not particularly surprising, then, that despite the laundry list of obvious distinctions separating the northern principalities from those of Wales, Chrétien's weak Arthur appealed to a Welsh aristocratic elite likewise contending with the kings of England. The aim of [Part III](#) will be to contextualize this implicit literary alliance between the northern French princes and their Welsh counterparts.

Chapter Four

Politics and Patronage in Wales

Akin to the autonomous and competitive *regno*, of northern France, the three major kingdoms of medieval Wales (Gwynedd in the north, Powys stretching along the eastern frontier, and Deheubarth in the south¹) were likewise governed by rival dynasties disrupted alternately by payability² and the kind of pillage economy made familiar in a continental context by Georges Duby (*Guerriers et paysans*). Using terms that could equally apply to the make-up of the northern principalities of France, R. R. Davies has described Medieval Wales as “a collection of self-regulating and self-disciplining local communities overlaid by a veneer of royal and seigniorial authority” (*Conquest* 133). Such political fragmentation was reinforced by geographic diversity: mountain ranges and tidal estuaries sectioned the country, isolating local polities at the expense of centralization and widespread political cohesion. Two prominent twelfth-century poets in fact frowned upon territorial expansion: Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr advised that “it is foolish to own more of the world than comes from God,” and Elidir Sais similarly warned Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to “beware of raiding beyond boundaries” (quoted by Davies, *Conquest* 14).

The cohesion they lacked politically, however, the Welsh claimed culturally, and long before individual French principalities came to view themselves as part of a *natio gallicus*, the singular group identity of the Welsh was as notable as their divisions. Shared myths and literary traditions, belief in a common descent from the Britons, common law, and a relatively uniform language constructed an all-Wales community recognized as distinct by both Welsh and non-Welsh. In Norman writs Wales and the Welsh were referred to as a single place and a single people, and the Welsh themselves veiled regional fragmentation in the all-inclusive terms *Kymry* (the Welsh) and *Brytanyeyt* (the Welsh, literally the British), the latter not only devoid of the low status associated with the Old English *w(e)alh* (slave), but heavy with both the memory of a united Britain and the hope of a pan-British resurgence under Welsh rule (McCann 46–7). As seen above in chapter one, early Medieval Welsh literature assumes and at times insists on a unique British identity; different from the situation across the Channel, in Wales a national ideology can be seen to precede a central polity. Despite dynastic infighting, the Welsh created a degree of cultural identity coincident with a linguistic, legal, and mythic political community—a “nation”—that does not seem to appear in France before the beginning of the fourteenth century (Guenée 26).

Like the cultural material they preserved, the itinerant poets of the Welsh

princes likewise bridged political and geographic divisions. Their poems, like descriptive maps, recited finely detailed circuit tours of the whole of Wales (*cylch Cymru*); the poets themselves moved freely between regional princely courts, enjoying the protected travel as well as the court privilege and royal patronage that had long been part of the bardic profession in Wales as in Ireland (J. E. Caerwyn Williams). Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, for one, boasted illustrious patrons from all three of the major principalities of Wales, serving at the courts of the Welsh princes “in the forefront of native opposition to the Norman[s]” (McCann 62) —Owain (d. 1170) and Dafydd ab Owain (d. 1203) of Gwynedd, Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160) and Owain Cyfeiliog (d. 1197) of Powys, and Rhys ap Gruffudd (d. 1197) of Deheubarth. To be sure, court poets of the eleventh and twelfth centuries praised local rulers and local kingdoms. But they portrayed individual Welsh princes as innate representatives of an undivided Britain (*Prydein*), to the extent that Davies credits aristocratic court literature with constructing “a considerable measure of cultural unity” in Wales (*Conquest* 18).

Just as the myth of *Prydein* existed in poetry, thirteenth-century Welsh law likewise assumes Wales to be a single legal unit. Contemporary documents refer to Welsh common law as *cyfreithiau Hywel Dda* (the laws of Hywel the Good), named after the tenth-century *tyuiyssavc Kemry oll* (prince of the whole of Wales) attributed with their assemblage (Price); two redactions, one southern and one northern, date from the reigns of Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth (d. 1197) and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd (d. 1240). Fostering what Davies has called a “mythology of legal and even constitutional unity,” the prologues to both redactions express an “all-Wales ideology,” warning that *nep yg Kemry* (anyone in Wales) who fails to observe Welsh laws will suffer “the curse of all Wales”—*un Gymry* (“Law” 56).³ Even the kings of England recognized Welsh legal autonomy and distinction, and in 1201 the first formal written agreement between an English king and a Welsh prince clearly differentiated between King John’s law of the English, *lex Anglie*, and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth’s law of the Welsh, *lex Wallie*. In 1278, according to an entry in the *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Welsh law “and no other” still prevailed “throughout Wales and the marches, as far as the power of the Welsh extends” (entry 1109, p 333). Davies quotes the *Register* of John Pecham, in which the backdrop of an independent Welsh law serves as the basis for collective identity and the rejection of foreign overlordship: “The people of Snowdon assert that even if their prince should give seisin [possession] of them to the king [of England], they themselves would refuse to do homage to any foreigner of whose language, customs and laws they were thoroughly ignorant” (“Law” 52). Generations after the Norman Conquest, bureaucratic vocabulary of the thirteenth century acknowledged the persistent independence as well as the unique cultural identity of Wales.

Such cultural resilience belied centuries of political subjugation to more

powerful foreign neighbors and preserved distinct linguistic and legal identities despite Roman, Saxon, Viking, and Norman conquest and colonization.⁴ From the seventh century Welsh kings paid tribute as clients of Mercian and West-Saxon kings, conceding tenant status by surrendering hostages, appearing at the courts of overlords, paying tributes, witnessing charters, swearing fealty, and promising military service. By the end of the seventh century many of the nobles subject to King Ine of Wessex were Welsh, and Higham has noted that Anglo-Saxon laws accorded Welsh nobles a lower *wergild* and lesser legal status than that of Saxon churls, the lowest ranking freemen (145). Things did not improve. Higham goes so far as to suggest that Anglo-Saxon society of the ninth and tenth centuries practiced a kind of cultural “apartheid” against the Welsh, and he imagines not only that “the speaking of Welsh was a liability” but that adoption of the English language would have been essential to a Welshman’s socio-economic advancement (93). In the late ninth century, if we can believe Asser’s *Life* of King Alfred, external western threat from Scandinavians as well as punitive Saxon raids from the east forced both southern and northern Welsh kings to accept the rule of King Alfred of Wessex (d. 899) (Smyth 358–60). By the middle of the tenth century—precisely the time when the author of the *Armes Prydein* called for an armed uprising against Saxon taxation-Welsh submission to Wessex is confirmed in several Anglo-Saxon charters witnessed by Welsh *subreguli*, underkings of the West-Saxons (Smith, “Morgannwg” 3). In entries for the final third of the tenth century, the *Brut y Tywysogyon* records Saxon raids that penetrated deep into Wales, “ravaging” (*diffeithwyt*) and “subduing” (*darystygawd*) lands from Caerleon-on-Usk in the southeast to the island of Anglesey in the northwest (e.g. entries for the years 967–993). Most of northeast Wales was under Saxon political control, and along the midland border settlers had ventured beyond Offa’s Dyke, the putative eastern border of Wales. Even after the Viking threat had diminished, the southeastern kings of Morgannwg continued to acknowledge West-Saxon overlordship throughout the tenth century, and in the latter half of the eleventh Rhys ap Tewdwr recognized the Norman overlordship of Gwiliam Bastard, *tytyssawc y Normanyeit a brenhin y Saeson a’r Brytanyeit a’r Albanwyr* (William the Bastard, prince of the Normans and King of the Saxons and the Britons and the Scots, *Brut y Tywysogyon*, year 1087). Foreign overlordship of Wales was by no means introduced by the Normans; it was an “external superiority” that the Normans secured and inherited from Saxon kings (Smith, “Morgannwg” 9). The salient point, at least in part, is that despite centuries of conquest the Welsh proved remarkably adept at retaining their cultural singularity.

Henry I was the most significant figure in the subjugation of Wales before Edward I. By the end of his reign in 1135, eastern portions of Gwynedd were under Norman control in the north. Punitive expeditions in 1114 and 1121 forced the dynasties of Powys and Gwynedd to acknowledge their client status to the English Crown. Even more secure in the south, direct

Norman control held Ceredigion, Dyfed, Ystrad Tywi, Pembroke, Gower, and Morgannwg. Many of these regions were recovered by the Welsh during Stephens reign, only to be once again reclaimed by Anglo-Normans in the first two decades of Henry Us reign. But by the final third of the twelfth century, the aggressive Anglo-Norman advance into Wales had ended. Midway through his reign, after having led military expeditions into Wales in 1157, 1158, 1163, and 1165—all with varying degrees of failure—Henry II dramatically altered his approach. Not only did he enter into conciliatory agreements in 1171–72 with both the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth and Owain of Gwynedd (accords that nominally lasted until Henrys death in 1189⁵). He extended to both Rhys and Owain his protection against aggressive marcher lords in exchange for the princes' homage and acknowledgment of Henrys clientship. What is more, Henry appointed Rhys “Justiciar of Wales,” elevating the Welshman to the equivalent of a royal seneschal, a position according to Jean Le Patourel among the kings highest ranking “agents exécutifs” and “vicerois” (*Feudal Empires* X: 106–7, 116). Such royal favor prompted the chroniclers of the *Brut y Tywysogyon* to dub Rhys *y gwr a oedgaredicaf gyueillt gann y brenhin yn yr amser hwnnw* (the man who was a most beloved friend of the king at that time, year 1175). While John Gillingham has shown that this Angevin-Welsh “détente” was not exactly the mutual commitment to peace imagined by W. L. Warren and R. R. Davies, it is nonetheless clear that English offensives in Wales turned progressively more defensive, so that by 1183–4 Henry II was increasing expenditure on royal castles in South Wales and recruiting Gerald of Wales as his negotiator-advisor (“Henry II” 226, 228, 231). From the late twelfth century, a new vocabulary distinguishing *pura Wallia* (native Wales) from *marchia Wallia* (the March of Wales) attests to this balance of power between native rule and foreign suzerainty. The dual terminology, while acknowledging the coexistence of two separate authorities, conceded that the Norman conquest of Wales remained incomplete (Davies, *Conquest* 213 and *Lordship* 67; Smith and Pugh 216–17).

Such official vocabulary also emphasized the frontier zone that remained outside of both Wales and England, a zone that developed over the thirteenth century an increasing level of immunity from the legal jurisdiction of the king of England. Though Henry II repeatedly enforced his authority over both the Welsh and Anglo-Normans in the march, his sons allowed liberties to multiply. Richard did little to curtail marcher aggression; and in 1200 John granted William de Braose all the land he could conquer from his Welsh enemies—thereby relinquishing royal jurisdiction in the march. As opposed to the restricted baronial powers in the rest of England, the English-Welsh march was a zone of institutionalized fragmentation—ruled by what R. R. Davies has referred to as a “pathology” of fragmented authority (*Lordship* 6) —in which English barons could exercise sovereign control over the Welsh land they conquered. With a similar autonomy to their counterparts in the northern

principalities of twelfth-century France, thirteenth-century Marcher lords owned what territory they were able to annex and controlled its succession; they could wage private war, issue writs, administer justice, and establish their own military administration of sheriffs and mounted patrols (Rees 43–44).⁶ Far from wielding supreme authority in the march, the English Crown under King John was often directly opposed by marcher franchises that lay outside the orbit of the king's governance and law (e.g., Warren, *King John* 109–116).⁷ Establishing that disputed royal disseisins [i.e., dispossessions] were to be resolved by a judgment of peers *in marchia*, and moreover that suits in which Welshmen were involved were not to be brought before the king's court but tried *in marchia*, the *Magna Carta* of 1215 won the first formal recognition in historical record of the differentiation between English, Welsh, and Marcher law, and it solidified the immunity of the March from John's royal court (Smith, “Magna Carta” 347). English and Welsh baronial independence thus blossomed in the first third of the thirteenth century, despite John's increased interest in redefining and intensifying his insular overlordship following the loss of Normandy.⁸

Native Welsh lords claimed similarly regalian privileges in their territories (Rees 23), and in the last century of independent Welsh rule it was the ambitions of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd that most advanced native princely power. Llywelyn contended with both John and Henry III to lay the groundwork for the 1267 Treaty of Montgomery, important for at least two reasons. In it Henry III recognized the right of the prince of Gwynedd and his heirs (Llywelyn's grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, d. 1282) to bear the title “Prince of Wales.” And the Crown ceded further authority to Llywelyn by granting him feudal control over “all the Welsh barons of Wales.” Though the treaty was overturned in 1284, when the Statute of Rhuddlan annexed Wales into England and ceased to recognize Welsh law, it nonetheless represents the culmination of Gwynedd's efforts to consolidate and centralize the principalities of Wales.

By 1208, Llywelyn had succeeded in making vassals out of the rulers of both Deheubarth and Powys, consolidating the Welsh satellites of Gwynedd and making himself the undisputed overking of native Wales from 1218 to his death in 1240. The three Arthurian romances, though undedicated and anonymous, are thought to date to Llywelyn's rule, and the degree of political unity achieved at that time may indeed have inspired the cultural confidence with which *y rhamantau* appropriate continental romance for an aristocratic Welsh milieu.⁹ The court poet Prydydd y Moch praised Llywelyn by cataloguing eighteen courts and castles (both native and Norman) seized by the ruler, including Aberffraw, Caerfyrddin, Degannwy, Abertawe [Swansea], Cydweli, Caernarfon, Caerlleon, Amwythig, Aberteifi, Elysmer, Sant Clêr, Aberhonddu, Hawrffordd, Rhuddlan Deifi, Rhuddland Degeingl, and Mold. The list is impressive, and maps all corners of Wales as Llywelyn's domain (poem cited by Owen, “Literary Convention” 78–9).¹⁰ The northern redaction

of the native Welsh law tracts dates to his rule, and their decidedly royalist tone suggests a literary campaign designed to specify and support the preeminence of Welsh kingship.¹¹ Llywelyn asserted legal and territorial jurisdiction well outside of Gwynedd, intervening in and repairing dynastic feud by partitioning the kingdom of Deheubarth in 1216, a partition that remained intact until his death. Arbitrating dispute between dependent princelings and assuming power over customary laws of land distribution, Llywelyn claimed for Welsh kingship control of land and justice both.

Notwithstanding the advance in princely power forged by Llywelyn, he competed directly with the English king for Welsh loyalties, and his efforts to form a federation of Welsh princes were stalled by frequent side-swapping and the “noble disaffection and fractiousness” that caused what Davies has termed the “chronic instability of Welsh political society” (*Conquest* 70). The events of 1211 and 1212 are illustrative in this regard. Though several prominent princes supported the English Crown in events leading up to Llywelyns humiliating truce with John in 1211,¹² all of them soon after joined Llywelyns anti-English alliance with Philip Augustus in 1212. Conversely, two southern princes who had supported Llywelyn in 1211 became two of only three Welsh princes not to join the confederation of 1212. Significant dissenters of this period are later named in chancery enrolments as adherents of Llywelyn (Treharne).

But as Llywelyn struggled to consolidate his control over native Wales, so did he learn to exploit the patronage and protection of English kings and Marcher lords alike. He himself married the illegitimate daughter of King John in 1205, a “friendship” tie that guaranteed his survival in 1211. With the intent of fortifying and securing his territories, he married all of his five children by Joan into prominent Marcher families: his heir, Dafydd, married Isabel de Braose; Gwenllïan married William de Lacy; Helen married John earl of Chester; Gwladus Ddu survived her first husband, Reginald de Braose of Brecknock, to marry Ralph Mortimer; Margaret outlived John de Braose of Gower to later marry Walter Clifford. In 1212 Llywelyn aligned himself with the Capetian king Philip Augustus against his enemies the *Angli* (Treharne). Joining with the English barony as signatories of the *Magna Carta*, Llywelyn and other Welsh princes safeguarded the jurisdictional immunity of the Welsh from the English *curia regis*, and they moreover won the immediate release of Welsh hostages, secured the abrogation of Llywelyns 1211 submission to John, and so added “a diplomatic and suggestively stabilized element to the military alliance of the Welsh princes” (Smith, “*Magna Carta*” 345).

The dynastic preservation of both the principality of Gwynedd and the overlordship of native Wales was Llywelyns primary concern, and he vied to pass on this patrimony intact to his sole legitimate son, Dafydd.¹³ Between 1220 and 1238 he repeatedly sought the approval of the English king, the Pope, and his Welsh magnates (in that order), seeking to guarantee an unchallenged succession. In 1220 Henry III recognized Dafydd as heir

apparent, and in 1229 Dafydd paid homage to Henry III for all of Llywelyn's lands. In 1222 the Pope condemned partability to illegitimate sons, and then furthered Dafydd's claim in 1226 by declaring Joan to be the legitimate daughter of King John. In 1226 Welsh princes swore fealty to Dafydd as heir, an oath they reaffirmed in 1238. Llywelyn sought to secure Gwynedd as the hub of a consolidated Wales and to turn to his advantage the English foothold in Welsh politics. It is tempting to imagine that just such a climate might have fostered the work of the three anonymous *rhamantau*. As Susan Aronstein has shown, there are certainly parallels to be drawn between Llywelyns tactics and the similarly hybridized nature of the prose tales; both borrow and imitate Anglo-Norman or English practice while sustaining the lore of *un Gymry*.

Y tair rhamant,¹⁴ the three Welsh romances—the only native *rhamantau*—have been so dubbed by modern critics not for stylistic reasons but because their basic content is analogous to three of Chrétiens continental verse romances (*Erec et Enide*, *Le Chevalier au lion* (Yvain), and *Le Conte du graal* (Perceval)). The French term *roman* originally designated something written in French as opposed to Latin, and as a genre term it comes to indicate octosyllabic couplet form. Thus in all respects “romance” is inappropriate to the Welsh prose tales, and medieval manuscripts identify them (as do the tales themselves) as *systoria* (story) or *chwedyl* (tale): *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* (The Story of Gereint, son of Erbin), *Chwedyl Iarllesy Ffynnwawn* (The Tale of the Lady of the Fountain), and *Historia Peredur vab Ejjrawc* (The Story of Peredur, son of York). Ever compelling about *y rhamantau* is in fact the hybrid nature that weds their Welshness to what has been deemed their wholesale imitation of continental tradition. *Y rhamantau* succeed at imitating romance in ways that absorb and reconfigure it as native Welsh. Like Chrétiens poems, for instance, the Welsh tales are geographically vague (excepting episodes in *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* that take place in and around Cardiff), and there is little evidence to associate them explicitly with one of the three chief courts of the ruling native dynasties—AberfTraw of Gwynedd, Dinefwr of Deheubarth, or Mathrafal of Powys (Owen 72). On the one hand such ambiguity differentiates *y rhamantau* from the detailed mapping favored by the contemporary court praise poetry discussed above. And yet it is via geographical vagueness that *y rhamantau* can be said to transcend the regional distinctions that fragmented Wales politically, to reinforce the *un Gymry* (one Wales) promulgated by the contemporary law prologues, to foreground heroes familiar to and shared by the whole of Wales.

Anonymous, undedicated, and stylistically variant, *y tair rhamant* likely represent the work of separate romancers (Mac Cana 118). Efforts to regionalize the tales are made more difficult by a general lack of place-names as well as by a total lack of contemporary references to them. Many have tied their blend of native and Norman elements to the mixed communities of the southern Marches (e.g., Jones, “Y Rhamantau”). Others have linked individual *rhamant* to the northern courts of Gwynedd, arguing the extent to

which continental ideals penetrated into twelfth-century *Pura Wallia* (Aronstein; Owen, “Arbennic”). Equally problematic are efforts to date *y rhamantau*, although most modern scholars tend to agree that they postdate and were likely influenced by the works of Chrétien de Troyes (e.g., Roberts, “Owein;” Bromwich, “First Transmission;” Rejhon). The most striking aspect of the tales remains, to my mind, their adoption of Chrétiens weak King Arthur, their imported Arthurian framework that marginalizes the king to foreground and idealize the ambitions of warrior knights. Though periodically performing feats of warrior prowess, as when winning the stag hunt in an early scene of *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* (397–404) or killing the Witches of Gloucester at the close of *Historia Peredur vab Efwarg* (70: 8–25), Arthur remains largely silent, passive, and harassed. As continental import he all but eclipses the native warrior-Arthur of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and he introduces into Welsh literary tradition an ineffectual King Arthur largely devoid of military skill. The imported depiction of decentralized overlordship, roughly contemporaneous with the ascendancy of Gwynedd under Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, glosses over contemporary tension between Welsh princes and their English suzerain. The fictional king of *y rhamantau* also minimizes with subtle intensity the cultural authority of Anglo-French overlordship in Wales: the Arthur of the Welsh tales serves to foreground familiar Welsh heroes. Peredur, Owein, and Gwalchmai would have been well-known to Welsh audiences as warriors of the Old North, just as Gereint would have been recognized as a hero of southwestern ancestry (Bromwich, “Celtic Elements” 53, “First Transmission” 279, 282; *Trioedd* 355ff, 488ff). Blending continental influence and native tradition, the three tales can be seen to belie Welsh political fragmentation by retelling tales of heroes who were claimed and praised by the whole of Wales. As figures of general rather than regional Welsh lore they reprise the glory of the Old North, contributing to an ideology of cultural unity that is matched in the thirteenth century by an emergent political unity.

Coincident with Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's rise to preeminence as overking of all Wales, the inactive and decentralized kingship of *y tair rhaman* imported Arthur begs comparison with the other imported suzerain in Wales, namely the English king. In the tales, recognizably native heroes upstage the authority and power of distant overlordship to win territorial independence. The powerful native Welsh Arthur of *Y Gododdin* or *Culhwch ac Olwen* is all but absent, replaced by a nominal sovereign incapable of extending his rule beyond a limited court of increasingly cowardly knights. Just as Chretien marginalized and limited the literary standard of kingship created by Geoffrey of Monmouth and embraced by the Anglo-French monarchy, so do the Welsh tales similarly divest of any native British authority the icon of kingship from which Henry II and his family sought to legitimize their inheritance of British rule.¹⁵ Far from idealized inimitable warrior-leader, the Arthur of *y tair rhamant* functions in opposition to the historical figures of Anglo-French

kings, minimizing and downplaying foreign suzerainty to bolster instead the autonomous exploits of tenants-in-chief.

Susan Aronstein has similarly argued that *Iarlles y Ffynnwawn* and *Gereint* further the powerfully independent yet “collaborative” government of the princes of Gwynedd. Her article skirts Arthur's royal weakness, however, as well as the overall decline of centralized authority in these two *rhamantau*, and is perhaps too quick to propose that the Arthur of these tales epitomized strong Welsh kingship. Arthur's overlordship and the model of decentralized government depicted in *Iarlles y Ffynnwawn*, *Gereint*, and *Peredur* bear little resemblance to the authority exercised by contemporary Gwynedd. Moreover, it is autonomous exploits and baronial independence from within distant overlordship, not strong centralized rule, which characterizes the tales. As the heroes' tales unfold, in fact, Arthur's court diminishes progressively in number as it declines in authority, and narrative progression removes heroes from the orbit of the king, decentralizing monarchy to prioritize a barony of familiar Welsh knights. Owain, though head of Arthur's *penteulu* (war band), concludes his tale by leaving Arthur's court for *y gyfoeth e hurt* (his own lands, 819). Gereint likewise heads *parth a'e gyuoeth e hun* (for his own lands, 1450–51), and his tale ends with a description of both his own prosperous rule and the praise and admiration of his nobles: *ac y gwledychu o hynny allan yn lltuydannusy ef a'e uilwryaeth a'e wychdra yn parhau gan glot ac admic idaw ac y Enyt o hynny allan* (and he ruled successfully from then on, his valor and prowess lasting with fame and admiration for him and for Enid from that time on, 1451–53). *Peredur* more succinctly emphasizes the hostile factionalism threatening Arthur's realm, opening with a brutal affront on Arthur's queen and the humiliating invasion of his court that require the intervention of an independent and inexperienced knight (11:21–12:11).¹⁶ In other words, it is autonomy rather than clientship to Arthur that distinguishes the Welsh heroes. The distant overlord commands little notice, offers no protection, and wields scant sovereign power, and such a depiction of suzerainty would resonate powerfully throughout much of the thirteenth century for the nobles of a Gwynedd-led Welsh federation vying for autonomy from the English crown.

In this political context, the Welshing of the decentralized Arthurian overlordship of romance suggests a means of piecing together subtle opposition to the tactics of cultural assimilation and territorial acquisition which characterized the English presence in medieval Wales.

PART III

The New King Arthur of French and Welsh Romance

[Part I](#) of this study called attention to the long insular Arthurian tradition, both vernacular and Latin, which responded in part to centuries of foreign conquest by constructing a literary identity for the Britons and a history of a native-ruled Britain. The *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth represents in many ways the culmination of this tradition. In it, powerful native kingship and the prophesy of eventual political renewal exemplify the myth of British unity, and King Arthur in particular piqued a widespread fascination that was shared alike by the Angevin kings of England, the Champagnois poet Chrétien de Troyes, the English Layamon, and the Welsh romancers. The pre-Galfridian material, followed by an examination of Geoffrey's history and his Arthur, laid important groundwork: these chapters emphasized and helped isolate the dramatic generic departure that differentiates insular British tradition from continental Arthurian romance. They also serve to underscore the history of national insular writing to which the three thirteenth-century Welsh Arthurian *rhamantau* are heir.

The rise and rapid expansion of Angevin rule, along with the ensuing centralization of continental Capetian influence, represent two of the more profound political changes to touch northern France, England, and Wales in the intervening years between Geoffrey's *Historia* and Chrétien's romances. A primary purpose of [Part II](#) was to contextualize the new trajectory of Arthurian romance against this political backdrop of reinvigorated kingship. In terms of having to negotiate increased royal power, counts of northern France shared remarkably similar experiences with princes of Wales. As the chapters above sought to show, both continental and insular baronies maneuvered to maintain a certain degree of independence from expanding kingship, whether from the more direct kingship wielded in France by Capetian kings or from the Plantagenet overlordship of Wales. Yet equally important to [Part II](#) was a consideration of the separate insular history that forced Welsh princes to deal with foreign conquest and occupation in a way not experienced on the continent. The central chapters of this study aimed first to recognize the complex political and cultural dynamics that ally the weak and decentralized King Arthur shared by two literary corpora, while then calling attention to the difference between continental romance and an insular tradition long accustomed to writing identity in response to foreign conquest.

Previous chapters have thus sought to lay the foundation for a final

section that attempts to explain, in terms of contemporary political conflict between monarchy and barony, the “why” of Arthurian romance’s abrupt “change of course”¹—a question that raises a different set of responses when directed to the continental poems than when directed to the insular tales. Generally, despite the formal, chronological, and cultural differences that distance Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century poems from the anonymous thirteenth-century *rhamantau*, they participate equally in a dramatic revision of the Galfridian ideal. Romance constructs what Maddox has termed a “textuality of crisis” (16),² a fictional world structured around a traumatic disparity between the strictures of monarchy and the desires of the king’s community of knights. Whereas Geoffrey’s *Arthuriad* hinged on strong central kingship buttressed by a warrior elite and fueled by a fervent sense of communal *patria*, the King Arthur of French and Welsh romance no longer occupies such a privileged place of effective political control. He is largely absent from action and almost wholly silent; his court the locus of contention, at best a point of narrative departure and the scene of narrative closure; his attending knights cowardly and his champions far away, his queen accosted and unfaithful, his servants and realm vulnerable to violence and attack. There are isolated, ambiguous textual moments that suggest royal strength in governance and in the administration of justice.³ Yet absent from romance is the collective solidarity that joined Arthur and the Galfridian Britons *unanimiter*, as one man (e.g., *HRB* §§155, 166, 174), and it is rather separation and independence from the arbitrary demands of the royal court that allows for the growth and development of the romance heroes. Not only does romance radically alter the nature of Arthurs kingship, but it likewise eliminates the sense of *patria* that bound Geoffrey’s king and his military campaigns so closely to the deeds and concerns of his warrior-advisors. Romance thus transforms Geoffrey’s British king, replacing idealized royal authority with a marginalized narrative question mark that consciously renders ambiguous the role of contemporary kingship and its relationship to seigneurial nobility. In this sense the French and Welsh romances form a single, coherent collection bent not only on revising their immediate Galfridian predecessors but on progressively weakening the literary portrait of regalian power that can be said to ascribe ideological force to the expansionist, interventionist, and increasingly centralizing monarchies of England and France. In the triangulated sociopolitical world that linked northern France, Francophone England, and Wales, the romance Arthur can be seen to represent a cross-Channel cooperative that inverts contemporary ideologies of hands-on kingship, one that ironically strips the great King Arthur of both conquering impulse and *fideles commitones* (*HRB* §169). It is in such a vein that chapter five seeks to contextualize the progressive decline of Arthur’s authority that characterizes Chrétien’s romances as well as *y tair rhamant*.

French and Welsh Arthurian romance, radically distinct from

historiography in its portrait of King Arthur and its decentralization of his *curia*, reconfigures both the literary ideal established by Geoffrey of Monmouth and the political reality of Angevin and Capetian rule. To be sure, and to borrow Ingham's phrase, specific Arthurian traditions "play out very differently" on either side of the Channel (9);⁴ the legacy of Norman Conquest and subsequent generations of French colonization and overlordship in England and Wales set up distinct insular dispositions toward Anglo-French kings. The "new" Arthur of French and Welsh romance indeed rewrites insular tradition, but such revision of national writing necessarily resonates differently in a Welsh context than in that of Chrétien's Champagne. Why, for instance, in the first third of the thirteenth century, do *y rhamantau* fail to reappropriate from Chrétien the native Arthur of *Culhwch ac Olwen* or the warrior of Geoffrey of Monmouth? Why instead do they choose to co-opt into Welsh language and literature a consciously diminished remnant of a national deliverer? Why, for that matter, would native Welsh court production replace an autochthonous military hero of Welsh national identity as if colluding with and imitating the continental culture of a hostile occupying presence? Why indeed would Welsh princes sanction and support a rewriting of native tradition that expunged a figure of national identity in favor of a weak French import? Taking its place in a long history of what has been referred to here as national writing, Arthur's all-but-absent sovereignty *my rhamantau* can offer tacit rebuke of the degradation of native tradition inherent to cultural assimilation. Far from reclaiming a native warrior-chieftain of the ilk who dominates the contemporaneous poetry of the princes, the romancers instead ironically introduce into Welsh a foreign genre and its equally foreign King Arthur, isolating these three tales as inherently alien from native material. Blind and unquestioned adherence to a noticeably declining and absolutely non-Welsh leader seems in fact to be the root cause of the constant political crises of *y rhamantau*. Individual episodic victories, within a general narrative progress of Welsh heroes away from Arthur's court, alleviate the crises of romance, however, and these Arthurian fictions can be seen to stage native Welsh independence from foreign overlordship. The import of weak foreign sovereignty into native media, as well as a generic focus on heroic separation from foreign court and king, seems paradoxically to turn the cultural absorption and assimilation of Chrétien's Arthurian poems into very insular material. Turning from a focus on opening sequences to a more thematic treatment of difference, chapter six examines the Welsh tales in their more contentious relationship to Francophone culture; the book thus concludes with a shift away from the cohesive similarity of the two national corpora to draw attention to the deeply-embedded antagonisms channeled across the Atlantic by Arthurian narrative.⁵

Chapter Five

Progressive Royal Decline in Arthurian¹ Romance

Chrétien's degradation of Arthurian tradition has not escaped critical notice.²Sara Sturm-Maddox ("Tenir") and more recently Lisi Oliver have linked Arthur's failing sovereignty to his inability to keep peace and maintain social order in the *Conte du graal*. To others equally focused on Chrétien's final romance, Arthur's old age (Vauthier; Bouche) or the sin of incest (Bogdanow; Guerin) precipitated his fall. Yet readers of both the French and Welsh corpora have tended by and large to ignore the negative aspects of Arthur and his kingship that span these romances. Stephen Knight has described Arthur's court in Chrétien's romances to be a "model of honorable life and a powerful source of acclaim" (*ALS* 78); to Armel Diverres, the Arthur of *Erec et Enide* "lives up to" a twelfth-century "ideal" of kingship, as does the Arthur of *Cligés*, and he describes both Arthurs as "quietly regal" ("Arthur" 60, 63);³ others have insisted alternately on the "ideal Wales" depicted *my rhamantau* (Aronstein 221), on the "brilliant blossoming" of ascendant Welsh independence represented by Arthur's court (Bullock-Davies, "*Exspectare*" 437), or even on the romance Arthur as the "greatest king in Welsh literature" (Cichon 31). But in Chrétien's works as in *y rhamantau*, Arthur never truly acts like "the ideal king of an ideal realm" (Köhler, *L'Aventure* 10), and his royal *curia* hardly exemplifies "the embodiment of a peaceful and prosperous community" (Bloch, "Wasteland" 270). Indeed, very little of the Arthurian society depicted at the outset of each romance can be deemed ideal, and the growth and progress of the romance heroes have little if any to do with the king or his government. All of the romances to some degree recast the model of Geoffrey's epic warrior, replacing the conqueror and prophetic national deliverer with an ambiguous leader, at times wise and judicious, but most often meek, ineffectual, unprotected, and court-bound.⁴

Wace's contribution to such a dramatic transformation must be duly credited. Although no direct evidence proves that Chrétien did not read Geoffrey's *Historia* in the original Latin, Wace's *Roman de Brut* of 1155 certainly provided Chrétien with a (possibly additional) Galfridian source.⁵Not only did Wace omit Merlin's prophecies from his translation,⁶ but he expanded on the narrative gaps left unfilled by the *Historia*, elaborating notably on the twelve years of peace established in Britain during Arthur's reign (Putter, "Finding Time").⁷ The lavish *curia regis* and peace-time war games so eagerly abandoned for renewed warfare in the *Historia*, once

channeled though the *Brut*, come to dominate Chrétien's portrait of Arthur's royal court. Narrative emphasis thus shifts from actual military deeds and victories to the more nebulous social skills that Glyn S. Burgess so effectively traced in his study of the twelfth-century French term *chevalerie*.⁸ Mediated through Wace, Geoffrey's British history was already markedly neutralized, and as one of Chrétien's many sources it had already been "de-politicized" of the prophecies that gave contemporary immediacy during Geoffrey's day to the prospective advent of Welsh political renewal (Blacker, "Transformations").⁹

Even so, Chrétien profoundly reconceptualized historiographical tradition to create a romance Arthur who remains strikingly original in his progressively diminishing regalian power. In the wake of Geoffrey of Monmouth's enormously popular and immediately disseminated *Historia*, such originality can only have been a deliberate departure from insular trend. To be sure, Chrétien seems as willing as any medieval "author" to veil his innovation under a topos of borrowed material (e.g., *Cligés* 18–24; *Lancelot* 20–27; *Perceval* 64–5).¹⁰ But he is also competitively creative and comfortable interjecting his authoritative presence as narrative director (Over). That Chrétien had sources other than Geoffrey, Wace, or Gaimar is assured by the proliferation in all five of his romances of Welsh personal names absent from the *Historia* and its Anglo-Norman parallels (Bromwich, "First Transmission" 276–7; Zumthor 476). Add to this the scornful complaint in the introduction of *Erec et Enide* against professional *conteurs*, whose work, presumably unlike that of Chrétien, succeeds only at corrupting and fragmenting (*depecier et corrompre*) popular tales or *contes* (19–22). He identifies written sources as the bases for both *Cligés* (18–24)¹¹ and *Perceval* (64–5)—however rhetorical and dubious we may consider such claims—and he further credits Marie of Champagne with the subject matter of *Lancelot* (20–27). Tristan themes pervade *Erec*, *Cligés*, *Yvain*, and *Lancelot*, with the notable twist that Chrétien's heroes reintegrate themselves into the society from which Tristan remains excluded (Bloch, *Etymologies* 226; Bruckner, *Shaping Romance* 91–104); deliberate recollection of the *Chanson de Roland* marks the first line of *Yvain* (Haidu, "Romance" 9–10); and Chrétien's own body of work forms the intertextual *entrelacement* that weaves *Yvain* together with *Lancelot*.¹² To quote Paul Zumthor, "Chrétien de Troyes puisera à toutes les sources d'inspiration que lui offrait son siècle, et les unifiera dans une forme parfaitement maîtrisée" (476). A lively spirit of innovating convention animates his romances, and Chrétien clearly reveled in reinventing the multiple sources available to him, unifying them in a perfectly mastered form.

Much has been written in fact on the masterful form that organizes each of Chrétien's romances, and much attention drawn to the adaptation of Chrétien's structure by the Welsh tales.¹³ Analyses of narrative pattern have in the last several decades informed the richest and most rewarding sociopolitical interpretations of the French and Welsh texts.¹⁴ Such work, with

its attention to structure and form, has guided my focus on marginalized romance kingship; in particular on the disjunction between contemporary political reality and a literary world of centralized knighthood that perpetuates, in the fictions of both corpora, an era of “sovereign principalities” that was rapidly changing in both France and Wales. The narrative sidelining of King Arthur and his court sets a fictional moratorium on the steadily building power of both continental kingship and insular overlordship, prioritizing instead the royally sanctioned independence of a noble knightly class. This is not to suggest that the romance depiction of knightly values remains either static or unambiguous—far from it, as the following discussion of the romances will show. But integral to the overall structuring of romance courtly society are the myths of royal hegemony and social unity. And essential to the illusion is a willful obfuscation of the very real and violent antagonisms that pitted separate tiers of the nobility against each other as much as against royal authority. Social divisions blend seamlessly in these Arthurian fictions, knights become kings, roaming terrorists are polite courtiers, and King Arthur progressively surrenders control over his court to a select band of heroic knights.¹⁵ In the place of regalian control, it is the heroic pursuit of chivalric adventure that directs the sociopolitical world of romance. The violence inherent to knightly pursuit occasionally appears as such, and examples abound of what Bisson has termed the “bad lordship” of the twelfth century, villains who sully Arthur's reputation and terrorize his realm with “seizures, assaults, ransoms, physical coercion, and intimidation” (“The Feudal Revolution” 33, 31).¹⁶ The heroic knights of these tales prove equally disposed to a violent and combative quest for the power of land or *castel-lany*. And yet, when performed by an elite of heroes, such knightly terrorism becomes socially beneficial *aventure*. Thus does Arthurian romance convert violence into entertainment and “good lordship,” masking contemporary social tensions with its syncretizing courtly society and its overall pattern of successful and socially beneficial heroic adventure.

Somewhat against the grain of recognizing the uniqueness of these works as individual texts—Brynley Roberts, for one, has recently insisted that we cannot regard the three Welsh tales as a unified group (“*Peredur*” 59)—and perhaps risking the charge of seeking the monolithic in culturally disparate literary traditions, the following chapter concentrates on the negative depiction of royal authority and the concomitant prominence of knightly adventure that form the common bases for both corpora.¹⁷ This may seem a narrow approach to episodic complexity; but it foregrounds the disjunction that is central to this study between the literary fictions of romance and contemporary material kingship. Immediately striking about the romance King Arthur and his place in literary tradition is his blatant dissimilarity from contemporary twelfth- and thirteenth-century models of royal power.

The fame of Arthurs court as well as scenes of festive court gatherings

create the illusion of centralized kingship that structures all of the romances, forming the hub of both narrative departure and narrative closure. In *Cligés*, it is the international reputation of Arthur's court that draws successive princes of Constantinople to Britain (14–17); and it is there that both Perceval and Peredur are sent to gain the experience needed to reclaim their lost patrimony (512–13; 9: 24–5). As unwelcome and mocked as the two Welsh characters are, and though they are neither knighted by the king nor initially accepted by his retinue, they yet identify themselves as “Arthur's knight[s]” and as hailing “from Arthur's court,” so that despite the narrative movement that removes the heroes from the presence of the king, the mention and idea of his royal court remain the standard of chivalric excellence to which they adhere.¹⁸ The occasion of lavish court feasts invites the intrusion that opens *Lancelot* (30–42) as well as the initial story telling of *Yvain* (1–17) and *Iarllles y Ffynnwaw* (1–4), just as a royal hunt launches the adventures of both Erec (27–38) and Gereint (1–49). It is likewise to Arthur's court that the romance heroes send defeated knights, and where they return after having proven or reestablished their prowess.¹⁹ The tacit significance of the king's court as “social, cultural, and narrative center” thus forms the “ontological reality” of romance society (Haidu, “Romance” 34–42). But Arthur's court is decidedly not the focus of these texts, and integral to Arthurian romance is the illusory nature of Arthur's centrality, the sharp dislocation between an expected royal core and actual narrative direction.²⁰ Far from a central authority, Arthur and his power are relegated to the margins of the narrative, his court decentralized and reduced to a narrative framework that initiates, in episodic waves, knightly independence and exodus from his royal court. Counter to a structural assumption of strong, centralized kingship, the narrative focus of Arthurian romance tilts the balance of power in favor of the knightly class. Both Chrétien's romances and *y tair rhamant* transfer Arthur's authority to his champions at a time ironically marked on both sides of the Channel by the rapid accumulation of royal power intent precisely on curbing baronial autonomy.

KNIGHT-KINGS IN *EREC* AND *GEREINT*

Already in Chrétien de Troyes' first romance, *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170),²¹ the portrait of Arthur's kingship as well as scenes of his court prove ancillary to the primary heroic progress of the title's couple. The primary narrative pattern of *Erec* consists of the hero's acquisition of a wife, their marital crisis, and the subsequent episodic progress toward reformulating the marriage and balancing Erec's roles as husband, knight, and eventual king (Haidu, “Narrativity” 134–38). The lavish ceremony that concludes the tale crowns as king the hero-knight, and as the robed and sceptered Erec sits in Arthur's own ivory throne, the end of the romance visualizes a new generation of noble-knightly-royal rule alongside and in apparent equality with Arthur's kingship.

Textual detail nonetheless sustains the king's great reputation and fuels a

general assumption of Arthurian excellence. The wealth of Arthur's kingship, for instance, has no equal, exceeding even that of Erec's father, King Lac of *Estre-Gales*²²—who is, according to Erec, wealthier than any king or emperor except Arthur: “*riches citez et beles sales/ et forz chastiax a molt mes peres,/ plus n'en a rois ne empereres,/fors li rois Artus seulemant*” (my father has many rich citadels, beautiful halls, and fortified castles; no king or emperor has more, except King Arthur alone, 3862–65). Erec continues, “*celui an ost je voirement,/car a lui nus ne s'aparoille*” (I set [Arthur] apart, in truth, for no one is his equal, 3866–7). Arthur's actions substantiate this fame. He spends his wealth with abandon—*Molt fu li rois puissanz et larges* (the king was very wealthy and generous, 6605)—perpetuating the rich socioeconomic world of his court by presenting horses and robes to new knights: ... *ot adobez li roi Artus/. IIII. cenx chevaliers et plus,/ toz filz de contes et de rois:/ chevax dona a chascun trois,/ et robes a chascun trois peire,/ por ce que sa corz mialz apeire* (... King Arthur had four hundred knights and more dubbed, all sons of counts and kings. He gave to each three horses and three sets of robes, so that his court would be more adorned, 6599–6604). Arthur's liberality at Erec's coronation makes the largesse of Alexander the Great²³ seem poor and miserly (*povres et chiches*):

Alixandres, qui tant conquist
que desoz lui tot le mont mist,
et tant fu larges et tant riches,
fu anvers lui povres et chiches;
Cesar, l'empereres de Rome,
et tuit li roi que l'en vos nome
an diz et an chançons de geste,
ne dona tant a une feste
come li rois Artus dona
le jor que Erec corona;
ne tant n'osassent pas desprendre
antre Cesar et Alixandre
com a la cort ot despandu. (6611–6623)

Alexander, who conquered so much
that he had the whole world under him,
and was very generous and rich,
was, compared to Arthur, poor and miserly;
Cesar, the Emperor of Rome,
and all the kings mentioned to you
in tales and in *chansons de geste*,
did not give so much away at a feast
as King Arthur gave
the day that Erec was crowned;
they would not dare spend so much,
either Caesar or Alexander,
as was spent at the court.

Thus in *Erec* does Arthur surpass conquerors and emperors in both deed and

reputation.

Such wealth defines the royal court as well, and from the outset *of li premiers vers*²⁴ Chrétien measures the richness of Arthur's Easter court at Cardigan by the great number of warriors and noble ladies who comprise the *curia regis*:

einz si riche ne fu vetüe,
que molt i ot boens chevaliers,
hardiz et combatanz et fiers,
et riches dames et puceles,
filles de rois, gentes et beles;.... (30–34)

Never was seen so rich [a court],
for there were many worthy knights,
strong and warlike and fierce,
and rich ladies and maidens,
the noble and beautiful daughters of kings....

Lengthy catalogues of the knights and barons in attendance further attest to the expanse of his royal domain and the reach of his cross-Channel authority (1671–1706, 1882–1959, 6581–95). Arthur's realm seems here a deliberate recollection of Angevin rule, extending from England, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, and Ireland, and stretching across the Channel to Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Maine, and Poitou.

The first mention of Erec fittingly introduces the hero as a worthy and already established paragon of this Arthurian world:

an la cort molt grant los avoit;
de tant com il i ot esté,
n' i ot chevalier si loé ...
Molt estoit biax et preuz et genz
et n' avoit pas .xxv. anz. ... (84–90)

[Erec] had received great honor at court;
as long as he had been there
no knight had been so praised ...
he was very handsome and brave and noble,
and he was not yet twenty-five years old.

His unexplained exclusion from the royal hunting party does not cloud the fact that Erec is exceptionally ranked among the knights of the Round Table. He is *li seconz* only to Gauvain, *li premiers* (1672–73); *fors Gauvain* (except for Gauvain), none is regarded *plus vaillant, plus hardi, plus preu* (2230–32). Erec is counted among the *meillors barons/... ces de la Table Reonde,/ qui furent li meillor del monde* (the noblest barons, those of the Round Table who were the best men in the world, 1667, 1670), and he is praised as the equal of Absalom in beauty, like Solomon in speech, as fierce in battle as a lion, and as generous as Alexander (2206–14). The vastness of Arthur's domain, the nobility of his *curia*, and the superlative prowess of knights such as Erec all

reflect on the social harmony of Arthur's court and on the vigor and wealth of Arthur's kingship.

Despite such sumptuous reputation, however, an almost immediate build-up of tension at court hints at and previews the potential for domestic dispute that will later escalate into the civil war, internal antagonism, and general political instability that mar the Arthurian society of *Gereint*, *Cligés*, *Yvain*, *Iarllles*, *Lancelot*, *Perceval*, and *Peredur*. Chrétien interrupts his opening description of the lavish Easter feast with the jolt of a negative conjunction—*mes* (but). Joan Tasker Grimbert has described the jarring about-face (“revirement subit,” “rupture,” “renversement”) of Chrétien's frequent use of *mes*, claiming that no other romancer-poet of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries made such frequent use of this conjunction to signal a shift in the narrative or in the attitude of the narrator (17, 18, 38–42).²⁵ The *mes* here opposes the assembled community of noble courtiers to the singular demand of the king: never were so many worthy knights and noble ladies assembled at court,

mes einçois que la corz fausist,
li rois a ses chevaliers dist
qu'il voloit le blanc cerf chacier
por la costume ressaucier. (35–8)

but before the court dispersed,
the king told his knights
that he wished to hunt the white stag
in order to revive the custom.

Arthur's wish to *ressaucier* the White Stag custom earns immediate criticism from his nephew and greatest knight Gauvain—*li premiers*—who voices the apparently common and long-held opinion that such a return to past ways will only cause trouble at court:

“Sire, fet il, de ceste chace
n'avroiz vos ja ne gré ne grace.
Nos savomes bien tuit piece a
quel costume li blans cers a....
Maus an puet avenir molt granz....” (41–49)

My lord, said [Gauvain], from this hunt
you will receive neither gratitude nor thanks.
We have all known for a long time
what custom is associated with the white stag....
Great evil can result because of it....

The old custom seems harmless enough: whichever knight manages to kill the white stag wins the right to bestow a kiss on his choice of the most beautiful lady at court (45–48). But the potentially violent problem is that every knight in attendance has a beloved whose beauty he is prepared to defend in combat, *par chevalerie* (295). Gauvain, recognizing the fierce competition for honor

among Arthur's 500 warrior-knights, puts voice to the very real likelihood for anarchy that here overshadows Arthur's whim and renders suspect his sagacity as ruler (Maddox, *ARCdT* 15). Clearly concerned more with the exercise of power than with collective concord, Arthur agrees with Gauvain (“*Cesaige bien,*” 59) but at this stage dismisses his nephews advice out of hand, “*car parole que rois a ditel ne doit puis estre contredite*” (because the word of the king should not be contradicted, 61–2). The entire court soon echoes Gauvain's objection. Greatly upset by the king's insistent plan to bestow the customary kiss (*an grant esfroi*, 302), Arthur's knights confirm that only internal strife and dissent will result:²⁶

Par la cort an font grant murmure:
li uns a l'autre a fie et jure
que ce n'iert ja fet sanz desresne
d'espee ou de lance de fresne.
Chascuns vialt par chevalerie²⁷
desresnier que la soe amie
est la plus bele de la sale;
molt est cest parole male. (291–298)

Throughout the court there rose a great outcry.
Everyone was declaring and swearing
that this [the right to bestow a kiss] would never happen without a dispute
of swords or ash lances.
Every knight wanted, in armed combat,
to prove that his beloved
was the most beautiful in the hall.
This talk was very disturbing.

It is only once such *parole molt male* threatens to implode his court that Arthur relents and rethinks his initial rejection of Gauvain's advice: “*Biax niés Gauvains, conselliez m'an,/sauve m'annor et ma droiture,/que je n'ai de la noise cure*” (Dear nephew Gauvain, advise me, with respect to my honor and my power, so that I can avoid the strife, 308–310). Both Gauvain and Guenievre counsel the king to withhold the kiss until Erec's return, and their recommended softening of the royal “droit coutumier” averts the outbreak of violence at court (Köhler, “Rôle” 387), reminding Arthur that his ability to maintain order depends on such harmony between his own power and the armed nobility that supports him. As he later remarks to his queen, “*qui croit consoil n'est mie fos*” (he who takes advice is no fool, 1219). Interesting here is not only the importance of custom so well analyzed by Maddox (*ARCdT*) and Duggan. Chrétien diverts common, ecclesiastical complaints against the “bad customs” (*male consuetudines*) and abuses of castle-based lordship away from knights and onto the improper caprice of Arthur's regalian power.²⁸ Bad social conduct stems in this sequence from the king rather than from knightly nobility.

Indeed, Arthur will soon define kingship to his plenary court as the power to legislate his will without dissent, and his sovereign recourse to past

custom seeks to regulate and order his court with what is clearly viewed as a disturbing arbitrariness. Addressing his court, he claims the particular right to preserve (*garder et maintenir*) the ancient customs of his father, Uther Pendragon, and to safeguard them from falling into disuse (*remaigne*)—however unpopular and disliked they may prove to be:

“... n'est droiz que nus de moi se plaingne.
Et je ne voel pas que remaigne
la costume ne li usages
que siaut maintenir mes lignages....
L'usage Pandragon, mon pere,
qui rois estoit et emperere,
voel je garder et maintenir,
que que il m'an doie avenir....” (1759–70)

... it is not right that any should find fault with me.
And I do not want to fall into disuse
the custom and traditions
upheld by my ancestors....
The custom of my father Pendragon,
who was king and emperor,
I aim to preserve and uphold...
no matter what may happen to me.

But Arthur's claim to “preserve” the stag hunt is not so much an effort to uphold ancient custom as it is an attempt to reinstate (*ressaucier*) a part of Uther's old order that Arthur's court has already discontinued and rejected. In Arthur's insistence on reviving the “anterior order” of Uther's custom, Maddox has seen a concern for “juridical continuity of customal law” that echoes that of the first decade of Henry II's reign (*ARCdT* 15, 29), when the Angevin king systematically set out to reverse the losses of Stephen's “anarchy” by both restoring the rights and holdings of his grandfather Henry I and reducing the local authority of his earls (G. White 77–129). Very much like Henry II, however, Arthur here proves to be particularly adept at couching the restoration and recovery of past order in terms of continuity. The stance taken in Henry's coronation charter, as in his writs and charters generally, “ignored Stephen” and promised full recognition of all gifts, liberties and free customs conceded by Henry I (G. White 10). In this way Henry forged a sense of continuity despite the nineteen-year gap and dramatic regnal losses that separated his reign from that of his grandfather. Whether or not the Arthur of Chrétien's *Erec* was intended to conjure for his audience the contemporary policies of Henry II, or perhaps even those of his Capetian rival Louis VII, must remain in the realm of speculation. Clear, however, is the rising ideological crisis that opposed knightly barons to the order of royal authority. In *Erec* both hunt and custom conclude without the eruption of court violence. Yet Arthur's attempt to revive aspects of a past and unpopular social order hints at a fundamental rift already developing in the social world of King Arthur and his knights. Chrétien wrote roughly two decades before

Philip II's solidification of effective political dominance in France. But he clearly sensed and dramatized a political tension brewing between king and nobles, and the opening sequence of his earliest romance sets up a court crisis ultimately resolved not by Arthur but by Erec's successful adventure of the Sparrow Hawk game.

Though Arthur opens this tale threatening to wield power in direct opposition to the concerns of his knights, the narrative prioritization of Erec, and his adventures both to win and to keep his wife Enide, significantly defuse the menace of Arthur's kingship. Despite whatever glimpse of contemporary historical kingship can be caught in the opening sequence of the White Stag custom, the overall narrative insistence on Erec's progress culminates not only in his coronation but in the possibility of a new kind of rich and sumptuous monarchy that evolves out of Arthur's noble knights.

The final scene of the romance, Erec's coronation (6636–6878), transfers symbols of royal power from one king to another. Arthur and Erec sit side by side in two identical white ivory thrones (6651–3).²⁹ The narrative pauses at length on Erec's silk, jeweled, robe, magnificently embroidered with the figures of the Quadrivium: Geometry measures the length and breadth of the universe; Arithmetic calculates time and the number of drops in oceans, leaves in forests, and the amount of sand in deserts; Music harmonizes sound and all instruments; and Astronomy controls the stars, the moon, and the sun (6674–6747; Maddox, *ARCdT* 14). As Erec sits draped in this robe, Arthur seats Enide in his own place, removing himself so that the new royal couple can be anointed and crowned (6771–6807). The two gold crowns glitter with such dazzling gems that Arthur, along with everyone in the palace, is momentarily blinded by their brilliance (6782–91). Arthur next transfers to Erec an emerald scepter, carved with every kind of fish, beast, and bird, making him the king *il dut estre*:

Li ceptres fu au roi bailliez
qui a mervoilles l'esgarda,
si le mist, que plus ne tarda,
li roi Erec an sa main destre:
or fu rois si com il dut estre. (6820–6824)

The scepter was handed to the king [Arthur]
who looked at it in awe
and put it without delay
in the right hand of King Erec:
now he was king as he ought to be.

His queen at his side, Erec sits crowned on Arthur's throne, adorned with a robe and scepter whose artistic displays seem to confer control over the entire natural world. Remarkable in this concluding image of kingship “is that the king thus arrayed is Erec and not Arthur” (Maddox, *ARCdT* 14). Chrétien ends his earliest romance with the joyous celebration of a new royal couple, a successful noble-knight-king whose adventures first mediate escalating

disquiet at Arthur's court before directing him toward his own political and territorial autonomy.

Even more so than the French romance, *Gereint uab Erbin* pares down Arthur's narrative role, eliminating the elaborate wedding and coronation feasts that set the stage for many of Chrétien's positive descriptions in *Erec* of the king's fame, dominion, and liberality. Arthur indeed "gives" the maiden away, but in stark contrast to Chrétien's 200 lines (1870–2071), the terse account of Gereint's "wedding" requires barely three: *Ac Arthur a uu rodyat ar y uorwyn y Ereint, a'r rwym a wneit yna rwyg deudyn a wnaythptuyd y rwyg Gereint a'r uorwyn* (And Arthur gave the maiden to Gereint, and the bond that was made then between two people was made between Gereint and the maiden, 529–31). Still, in a comparison of opening sequences, *Gereint* portrays a decidedly Welsh court that proves to be very judiciously managed by Arthur and his queen; it is an organizational laxity rather than arbitrary rule that mars our opening impression of Arthur's court.

Arthur launches the tale, his name the first word of the first sentence, and his Pentecost court at Caer Llion the plenary occasion that foregrounds the court officials and noble barony of the opening scene. Arthur's three named officials occupy posts of native prestige: Odyar Franc the *distein* (steward, 11), Glewlwyd Gauaeluawr "Mightygrasp" the *[p]enn porthawr* (head porter, 18), and Gwalchmei the *[p]ennhaf penteulu* (chiefest of the war chiefs, 13–15). All three offices are attested in the Welsh law tracts, and they provide a notable contrast to similar terms deriving from Anglo-Norman influence—terms such as *marchawc* (knight), *iarll* (earl), and *barwn* (baron).³⁰ While notably Welsh, the world of *Gereint*, like that of *Erec*, appears so far to adhere to an expected standard of Arthurian greatness. The king proves to be unmatched in physical prowess, handily the victor in the hunt for the white stag. Rather than a kiss to bestow on the court's most beautiful maiden, the stag's head is the prize in the Welsh tale's version of the custom, and Arthur wins it before any other knight can make the kill: ... *ac Arthur a ymgauas ac ef, a chyn kyflauanu o neb arnaw, neu ry daroed y Arthur lad y benn* (and Arthur attacked [the stag], and before anyone could kill it, Arthur had cut off its head, 402–3).

When fighting erupts over the stag's head—a *ffawb o'r teulu a'r marchogyon yn amrysson yn chwerw am y penn* (every member of the warband and the knights argued bitterly over the head, 413–14)—Arthur and his queen jointly and judiciously arbitrate the discord. The mutual diplomacy of the king and queen reflects a ruling couple skilled in the tact required to diffuse court tension, and in this sense the joint rule of Arthur and Gwenhwyfar exemplifies the cooperation that seems to hold together the monarchy and its court. Powerful, however, is an early hint of defiance and an initial impression of disorder that subtly feed into the sharp verbal dispute over the head. Glewlwyd the *penn porthawr* fulfills his office at only one annual feast, refusing the post at all other occasions. The string of mishaps

that next traces its way across this opening sequence overshadows Arthur's display of royal counsel and court justice, foregrounding instead governmental confusion. At first, Arthur fails to recognize his forester-messenger—a fact the tale finds *ryued* (odd, surprising 35). Also causing odd surprise to both king and queen (*ryuedu a oruc Arthur* 70; '*minneu a ryuedeis*' *heb yr hi* 103) is the fact that the hunting party leaves the queen and Gereint behind, both of whom are allowed to sleep late despite their direct requests (and Arthur's permission) to participate in the hunt (70–105). The fault, it seems, is that of the *distein*, made personally responsible for ensuring that the entire hunting party be ready on time. Immediately after granting the two requests, Arthur declares that '*a bid y keryd ar y distain ony byd parawt pawb y bore y uynet y hely*' (on the steward be the blame if not everyone is ready to hunt in the morning 58–60). Odyar not only fails in his duty to account for the missing queen and knight; he leaves the stables virtually empty, forcing the queen to set out all but unattended (82–87). Roger Middleton has found it “most unlikely” that an “unfavorable impression” of Arthur's court is here intended (151). Yet a general sense of mismanagement prevails. Glewlwyd's limited service, Arthur's limited familiarity with his groundsmen, Odyar's sub-par stewardship, the king's depleted stables, and particularly the “surprisingly odd” neglect of both the queen and a chief knight all render suspect, or at least start to undermine, the government of the king as well as the prestige of his officers. As in the case of *Erec*, the validity of royal justice remains the emphasis of the stag hunt sequence, and though in comparison to Chrétien's king Arthur here rules magnanimously and fairly with the help of his queen's counsel, an overall impression of disorder and incompetence characterizes Arthur's court.

Prose style suggests much the same. Despite Arthur's single feat of physical prowess, compound nouns—a hallmark of Welsh heroic description—are reserved for scenes of knightly combat, their absence from the opening sequence devaluing the narrative frame of the royal hunt in favor of heroic adventure. Gereint's rage, for instance, results in a *gwymp agheuawlchwerw clwyfedicdost briwedicyfryf* (deadly-bitter wounded-sick bruising-severe fall, 1053–4); in battle he is *gorulwg galonawcdic* (exceeding-wrathful and furious-hearted, 1075–6), striking blows that are *llidiawcdrut gyflymwychyrgreulawnfyrfy* (angry-valiant, swift-stern, and bloody-bold, 1106–7) as well as *eidiclym gvenwynnicdost cadarnfer* (zealous-keen, poisonous-bitter, and strong-brave 1303–4). Though Erec's elaborate coronation sequence is here missing, in which Chrétien regales us with a detailed description of the royal throne, mantle, crown, and scepter destined not for Arthur but for the heroic knight-king, the narrative progress away from Arthur's jurisdiction remains the same in the Welsh tale. Arthur or any mention of him is absent from the final *gwaryea* (games) of *y kae nywl* (the Mist Hedge, 1353–1453), and *y rhamant* concludes instead with an account of Gereint's own prosperous rule: *ac yd aeth Gereint parth a'e gyuoeth e hun, ac y gwledychu o hynny allan yn*

llwydannus, ef a'e uilwryaeth a'e wychdra yn parhau gan glot ac edmic idaw ac y Enyt o hynny allan (and Gereint went to his own realm, and he ruled successfully from then on; he and his bravery and prowess lasting in fame and admiration for him and for Enid from then on, 1450–53). Common to the narrative pattern of both tales is the development of a noble, heroic knight groomed by adventure and single combat to assume, in his own right, the exercise of sovereign power. After opening with various degrees of turmoil and disorder at court, both *Erec* and *Gereint* conclude by replacing Arthur's realm and jurisdiction with new knight-kings.

CLIGÉS: A FALSE HIGHPOINT

In what is arguably Chrétien's single overt tribute to Galfridian tradition, the Arthur of *Cligés* proves to be the most active and militarily aggressive version of the romance king to be considered here. Yet even so, Chrétien's king diverges markedly from his glorious predecessor, and despite the sense of a highpoint, this Arthur can be seen to fit well into Chrétien's overall pattern of progressive royal decline.

In the first third of the romance, a vocabulary of warfare and scenes of close combat align *Cligés* closely with the epic historiography of Geoffrey and Wace, and the action pivots around the feudal insurrection and treachery of Arthur's once-trusted vassal, Count Angrés of Windsor. A felon *qui pires est de Guenelon* (who is worse than Ganelon, 1068) and also a double of Geoffrey's Mordred, Angrés exploits his regency to usurp Arthur's realm. Far from doubling the adultery and disastrous civil war of Camlan, however, Chrétien rewrites the climactic fall of Geoffrey's Arthur so that the romance king emerges victorious and alive, the traitor defeated and killed, the realm and queen protected and intact, and Arthur's chief knights uninjured. With what Maddox calls "intertextual recall," Chrétien thus revises the "great traumatic Moment" of Arthurian tradition "with a wholly positive outcome" (*ARCdT* 10–11). The treason sequence ends moreover with the happy marriage into Arthur's lineage of the king's most successful knight, Alexander of Constantinople, and like an antidote to Galfridian loss, Chrétien's allusions to the *Historia* reconfigure downfall and destruction as a positive expansion of the Arthurian world.

Already in the opening scenes Chrétien seems to insist on the healthy reach of Arthur's domain, and the fame and lineage of both the king and his knights radiate outward from Britain and Brittany, attracting nobles from as far away as the Byzantine Empire. Arthurian Britain exerts a cultural pull that clearly surpasses the former glory of the Mediterranean world, and the narrative begins with a pointedly westward realignment of civilization. Seduced by tales of the glory to be found in Britain, Alexander, the young Greek prince of Constantinople and future emperor, abandons his patrimony to seek the *pris* (reputation), *los* (fame), and *enor* (honor) of Arthur's formidable and world-renown court (15; 84–5):

Oï ot feire messcion
Del roi Artus qui lors reignoït
Et des barons que il tenoït
An sa conpaignie toz jorz,
Par qu'estoït dotee sa corz
Et renomee par le monde. (66–71)

[Alexander] had heard talk
of King Arthur, who ruled at that time,
and of the barons that he kept
in his company always,
and because of whom his court was feared
and known throughout the world.

La terre estrange (the foreign land 148) of Britain and Cornwall (78), with its famous king and barons, represents for Alexander the seat of all *cortisie* and *proesce* (149–151). Though his own father offers to knight him and crown him ruler over *tote Grece* (all of Greece, 128)—*Demain vos ferai coroner,/ Et chevaliers seroiz demain* (I will crown you tomorrow, and tomorrow make you a knight, 126–7)—the young Greek understands chivalric worth to stem from Arthur's distant, Western court. He rejects his father's offer:

“Nus ne m'an porroit retorner,
Par proiere ne par losange,
Que je n'aille an la terre estrange
Veoir le roi et ses barons,
De cui si granz est li renons
De cortisie et de proesce.” (146–51)

No one could keep me—
not by pleading or flattery—
from going to that foreign land
to see the king and his barons
who are so greatly renowned
for courtesy and bravery.

Implicit in the young Alexander's request to leave is a perception that his native world is inadequate as both a model of royal *los* and as a competitive training ground for would-be knights. Whatever instruction-at-arms the prince has received, it has not, to his mind, prepared him to meet the famed Arthurian standard—*N'ai pas ancor si grant vertu/ Que je poïsse armes porter* (I am not yet worthy enough to bear arms, 144–5)—and according to Alexander, the privilege granted by his father the emperor fails to measure up against that of the *roi qui Bretaingne justise* (the king who rules Britain, 112). Justifying his departure to his father, Alexander makes it clear that only Arthur confers honorable knighthood:

“Car issir vuel de vostre empire,
S'irai presanter mon servise
Au roi qui Bretaingne justise,

Por ce que chevalier me face.
Ja n'avrai armee la face,
Ne hiaume el chief, jel vos plevis,
A nul jor que je soie vis,
Tant que li rois Artus me ceingne
L'espee, se feire le deingne;
Car d'autrui ne vuel armes prandre." (110–119)

For I wish to leave your empire,
And I will present my service
To the king who rules Britain
So that he might make me a knight.
Not for one day of my life
Will I ever have my face covered in armor
Or put helmet on my head, I swear to you,
Unless King Arthur girds around my waist
The sword, should he deign to do so,
For I do not want to accept arms from anyone else.

Alexander thus rejects his father's eastern empire to surrender himself entirely to the British supremacy of Arthur's tutelage, and the warrior standards of Arthur and his knights—their *enor*, *proesce*, *los*, *pris*, and *corteisie*—turn what have been called the fringes of European civilization into the center of idealized military values. Britain indeed constitutes the privileged domain of romance kingship in general (Baumgartner 1). Certainly in the opening sequence of *Cligés* Chrétien narrates a version of *translatio imperii* that transfers to Arthur's Britain the military fame and preeminence of the ancient world. Throughout the first third of *Cligés*, in fact, and as nowhere else in Chrétien's corpus, the famed reputation of insular monarchy comes close to being matched by narrative action. To be sure, the *Cligés* Arthur stands out as Chrétien's most powerful king-portrait. And yet this King Arthur can be said to exploit the expansive and at times abusive potential of royal power, and he indulges a penchant for absolute authority that may well have invited comparison to the contemporary monarchies of Angevin England and, to a lesser degree, Capetian France.

From the opening lines of *Cligés*, Chrétien encourages the conflation of insular British fame with the cultural superiority of France. The proem recounts a historical trajectory of *translatio studii*—in which the former glory of the Mediterranean is now eclipsed by continental civilization—that is immediately borne out by Alexander's westward search for knighthood and *grant los* in Arthur's Britain. Emphasis on western culture admittedly gets reversed in the latter half of the romance, when the story of Cligés and Fénice shifts narrative focus from Britain back to Constantinople. In the proem (1–42), however, the once supreme cultural influence of Greece is silenced and extinguished by the *chevalerie* and *clergie* now in France:

Ce nos ont nostre livre apris
Qu'an Grece ot de chevalerie

Le premier los et de clergie.
 Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
 Et de la clergie la some,
 Qui or est an France venue.
 Dex doint qu'ele i soit maintenue
 Et que li leus li abelisse
 Tant que ja mes de France n'isse
 L'enors qui s'i est arestee.
 Dex l'avoit as altres prestee:
 Car des Grezois ne des Romains
 Ne dit an mes ne plus ne mains,
 D'ax est la parole remese
 Et estainte la vive brese. (28–42)

Our books have taught us
 That Greece had chivalry
 First, fame and learning.
 Then chivalry came to Rome,
 And the height of learning
 That now has come to France.
 May God grant that it be retained here
 As long as it may please Him
 So that the honor now in France
 Might never leave.
 God lent it to the others,
 No one speaks anymore
 About the Greeks or the Romans—
 Their voices are silent,
 Their bright flames extinguished.

Cultural empire proves dynamic if not fragile here, moving from Greece to Rome before landing for a permanent stay in France. Chrétien's proem elevates the status of French language and culture in general and of his own Champagnois version of King Arthur's insular monarchy in particular. Not only does French romance become the medium of Arthurian values, but Chrétien claims as his domain tales of the chivalry, fame, learning, and honor of Greece, Rome, and Britain, and he portrays the Greeks only in the context of their desire for and assimilation into the Arthurian culture of French romance.

Alexander's expectations are hardly disappointed, and in the notable absence of Keu—Arthur's churlish seneschal whose biting tongue and vitriol color early sequences of *Yvain*, *Iarllles*, *Perceval*, and *Peredur*—Arthur greets the Greeks *deboneiremant* (graciously 381), and his barons warmly welcome Alexander: *N'an la cort n'a baron si haut/ Qui bel ne l'apialt et acuelle* (There was no baron at court so mighty that he did not address [Alexander] kindly and welcome him, 384–85).³¹ Elsewhere the romance similarly corroborates Alexander's impression of Arthur as *le meilleur roi del mont/ Qui onques fust ne ja mes soit* (the best king in the world that ever was or ever will be, 304–05).³² His trans-Channel realm includes Brittany, and far from crossing over

to conquer the Continent, as in Geoffrey's *Historia*, Arthur's dominion there is already secured and celebrated with *grant joie* (434, 559). The Bretons serve Arthur *come lor seignor droiturier* (as their rightful lord, 561), and when news of Angrés' treachery arrives from London, they muster ships in such number that it seems *que tote Bretainge s'an voise* (that the whole of Brittany had set sail, 1094). No one, in fact, had ever seen an army such as the one assembled to defend Arthur's insular realm: *Onques tex oz ne fu veüe/ Con li rois Artus assanbla* (1086–7). Pending civil war, and the fame it promises,³³ prompt Alexander and the Greeks to petition Arthur for knighthood, a request that is lavishly granted.³⁴ Arthur displays a liberality that befits so great a king, arming and equipping his new knights with *beles armes, cheval buen, and robes* (fine armour, a good horse, and robes, 1126, 1129).³⁵ Such royal generosity, combined with the fame of his barons and his wide dominion, buttress the cultural superiority and vast military resources that make the Arthur of *Cligés* unique in Chrétien's romances.

Yet as the first third of the poem comes to revolve in part around the domestic crisis triggered by the rebellion of Angrés, an increasingly ironic treatment of the king's rule obscures both the famed preeminence of Arthur and his knights as well as Chrétien's positive revision of Geoffrey's Arthurian climax.³⁶ Arthur is a brute here, and not the best one; his counterpart, the personified *Amors* (Love), proves overall the more effective ruler, more successful than the king at enforcing fidelity. The treason sequence in fact shares the narrative stage with the parallel love story of Alexander and Arthur's niece, Soredamors, and Arthur's war against baronial insurrection gets rhythmically interrupted by scenes of the lovers' tormented and unrequited courtly love.³⁷ War, in the case of both love and baronial service, results from a breach of feudal contract, and though Arthur fails to retain the loyalty of his baron Angrés, *Amors* doubles and upstages the sovereign power of the king by successfully exacting fidelity from his two recalcitrant love-servants. Narrative oscillation—and the narrator—in this way present *Amors* as a rival vying with Arthur for feudal control over this part of the poem:

Del roi Artus parler ne quier
 A ceste foiz plus longuemant,
 Einçois m'orroiz dire comant
 Amors les deus amanz travaille
 Vers qui il a prise bataille. (562–66)

I do not wish to speak of King Arthur
 any further at this time;
 instead you will hear me tell how
 Love attacked the two lovers
 against whom he was waging battle.

As Arthur's double and apparent competitor, the presence of *Amors* underscores the feudal structure that dominates domestic politics. Clear here, and unique in these texts, is that Arthur and *Amors* drive the poem by

exercising their superior political power. Both wield a similar brand of power, but while Arthur inspires rebellion, *Amors* unites in marriage. He is clearly the superior builder of empire: the marriage not only introduces Byzantine royalty into Arthur's lineage, but it also produces the eponymous hero of the romance.

Like Arthur, *Amors* violently punishes treason, tormenting his rebellious lovers with scalding heat, tortured sleep, and invisible arrows to the heart and eyes. A vocabulary of treason and vengeance dominates scenes between the lovers long before word arrives of Angrés' rebellion, and while Arthur's itinerant court sojourns peacefully in Brittany, war rages between *Amors* and his faithless servant Soredamors, who, brutally besieged, eventually surrenders to Love's sustained assault (e.g., 888ff., where Soredamors suffers *angoisse* and *grand painne* before she admits defeat by parsing her name as *sororee d'amors*, "gilded by Love," 953–980). If at first Soredamors is Love's reluctant vassal, Alexander declares his loyalty in no uncertain terms, implicitly dividing his allegiance between Arthur and *Amors*:

Ja mes festuz n'an sera roz
Par desfiance ne par guerre,
Que je doie vers Amor guerre.
Or face de moi tot son buen,
Si com il doit feire del suen,
Car je le vuel et si me plest. (854–859)

Never will any accord be broken,
out of defiance or war,
that I should seek with Love.
Let him do with me what he will,
as he should do with his subject,
for such is my wish and desire.

Rival lords and their parallel battles for feudal submission thus preoccupy the action of the first part of *Cligés*, and together Arthur and *Amors* secure the political realm and maintain the court with marriage and generation. In terms of narrative competition, *Amors* wields the control that ultimately produces Cligés, more than Arthur, *Amors* guarantees the continuation of the poem. Alternating between Arthur and *Amors*, warfare and love, Chrétien's narrative pattern works in part to challenge and impinge upon the singular authority of King Arthur.³⁸ This very rivalry will become increasingly problematic in *Yvain* and *Lancelot*, where the heroic knights recognize *Amors* rather than Arthur as their liege lord. Here, however, Chrétien fuses the two figures in a portrait of potentially abusive royal power that will soon require the corrective, intermediary justice of heroic, noble knights. As in the case of the communally rejected Stag Hunt custom of *Erec*, warrior knights increasingly set the parameters of Arthur's rule.

Even more damning to the reputation of *le meilleur roi del mont* is Arthur's own inactivity and the virtual absence of his internationally renowned British retinue. Very different from Geoffrey's king, the Arthur of *Cligés* never

leads his men into battle. Though reputedly the greatest knights in the world, famed for honor, bravery, and glory, Arthur's barons paradoxically rely on the foreign newcomers, watching as Alexander and his corps of twelve Greek compatriots repeatedly distinguish themselves as shrewd military strategists and keen warriors (e.g., 1301–36, where the Greeks capture four enemy knights; and 1741–2032, the extended sequence leading up to Alexander's capture of Angrès). The Galfridian flavor of the combat scenes is unmistakable, but Arthur's role at the forefront of military action has been supplanted by the young Greek. What is more, of Arthur's British knights, only the felon Angrès plays a prominent role. He is iniquitous—according to Alexander, *traitor et traïson/ Het Dex plus qu'autre mesprison* (God hates traitors and treason more than any other wickedness, 1683–4). And yet he alone among the Britons has the potential to equal and even excel Alexander in battle, an irony intensified by the negative conjunction *mes*:

Mes de grant force estoit li cuens
Et chevaliers hardiz et buens,
Que el siegle meillor n'eüst,
Se fel et traïtres ne fust. (1887–90)

But the count [Angrès] had great strength,
and he was a fierce and worthy knight:
there would have been no better [knight] in the world
had he not been a felon and a traitor.

In unexpected contrast, Gauvain earns distinction not for battle deeds or for the diplomatic speech that sets him apart in *Erec* and in Chrétien's later romances, but rather as the only native member of the *curia regis* to be identified by name: Chrétien mentions Gauvain a scant three times in the first part of the romance, and only in passing.³⁹ Compare this relative anonymity not only to Alexander's Greeks, named for the first time at 1269–79 and referred to repeatedly thereafter; but to Chrétien's fondness, showcased in *Erec et Enide*, for regaling his reader with substantial lists of Arthur's attending knights. Not so here. In *Cligés*, heroes familiar to the other romances are absent or at least anonymous; the king's counsel consists of unnamed knights and barons, his forces a nebulous *ost* (army). Far from spotlighting the greatest king the world has ever known, such lack of identity in the British camp instead diverts focus and attention not only to Alexander and *li Grezois* but to the traitor Angrès—the flower of British knighthood turned in violent opposition to Arthur's rule. The expectation of glorious Arthurian *chevalerie*, set up in the proem as an unmatched standard of French cultural *clergie*, and again in Alexander's westward quest from Constantinople, fails to coincide with the facts of the narrative. Like his rival *Amors*, Arthur wields sovereign power, yet his military successes against Angrès are due entirely to leadership other than his own, the return to peace in Britain negotiated not by the king but by Alexander's justice. Aspects of

Arthur's international renown in *Cligés* indeed invite comparison with literary and material models of the day: with the Arthur of Geoffrey's *Historia*, with the kings of the mighty Angevin Empire, with the reach of continental Capetian influence that was beginning to encroach on the autonomy of the great principalities of northern France. Yet *Cligés* renders ambiguous any such comparison, for it questions the effectiveness of its king's rule and tempers Arthur's governance with increased baronial participation.

Arthur's rage emphasizes how close royal power can come to tyranny. Different from the battle fury that characterized the Galfridian king, Arthur's rage dictates and tarnishes royal justice, producing anxiety and discord at court on account of its summary and excessive brutality. *Iriez et plains de mautalant* (irate and full of wrath, 1061), Arthur blames the civil war entirely on his royal counsel (*son tribol*, 1065), and he threatens to dispossess his barons of their lands should they fail to surrender the traitor Angrés directly to his justice (1059–1080). Arthur's barons agree on exile as an appropriate punishment for Angrés—*il an iert mis an essil*, 1072—but without fully comprehending the semantic range understood by the king, who later demands that all captives be *met en essil* in the sense of torture and execution (on *essil*, see Greimas). Alexander recognizes Arthur's predilection for summary justice, and in deference to his own *corteisie* and *chevalerie* he sidesteps the king to deliver four of Angrés' knights into the queen's protection (1337–44): *Ne vialt qu'autres en ait seisine, / Car tost les feïst li rois pandre* (he did not want any other to seize them, for the king would have had them hanged at once, 1340–41). Alexander the Greek thus embodies the warrior prowess (*chevalerie*, 1338) and the social code (*corteisie*, 1337) that prove otherwise absent from Arthur's rule.⁴⁰

Mes li rois ne s'an geue pas (but the king was not amused, 1345) by the queen's interference. *Molt correciez* in fact (very angry, 1409), Arthur has the captives remanded to his own discretionary justice (*a sa devise* and *sa justise*, 1407, 1408), whereby he himself resolves that by “lawful” judgment (*por droit et por jugement*, 1417) the traitors must be drawn and quartered: *li rois meïsmes esgardel Qu'an doit traïtor traïner* (1422–23).⁴¹ As in the case of Ganelon in the *Chanson de Roland*, treason arguably merits torture and capital punishment, and Arthur's insistence on public execution does not in and of itself imply an abuse of power. Likewise rage has long been an important characteristic of great literary kingship. Yet the reactions of Alexander and of Arthur's army in this instance translate Arthur's rage into unwarranted excess, suggesting that the sentence against Angrés should not extend to his lesser knights. Arthur's brand of royal justice is not so much fair-minded as it is intimately tied to his volatile temper, and his *mautalant* and *corroz* (wrath and ire, 1494) become disturbingly tangible in the body-parts of the quartered captives, dragged through the valleys and fields of Windsor (1483–85).

Public execution does not recur in the first third of the tale. Alexander makes clear to the followers of the count that only Angrés deserves death—

Nus (fors le conte qui est ci)/ De vos n'i a mort desservie (None among you deserves to die except the count here, 2140–41)—and Chrétien does not elaborate on his fate: *li rois n'a plus atandu/ Que lors n'an face sa justise* (the king dispensed his justice immediately, 2170–1). Instead, at the final surrender of Windsor Castle, Alexander promises Arthur's royal clemency to the captives:

“Alez,” fet il, “jel vos comant,
A mon seignor isnelemant,
Si vos metez an sa merci....
Ja n'i perdroiz manbre ne vie,
Se an sa merci vos metez.
Se de mort ne vos rachatez
Seulement por merci crier,
Molt petit vos poez fier
En voz vies ne an voz cors....
Ne perdroiz mie vostre voie,
Car tot son mautalant et s'ire
Vos pardonra li rois mes sire,
Tant est il dolz et deboneire.” (2137–55)

Go, he said, I command you,
Straight to my lord
And throw yourself at his mercy....
You will not lose life or limb
If you throw yourselves at his mercy.
If you do not save yourselves from death
By simply crying for mercy,
You have little chance
Of saving your lives and bodies....
Your path will not be in vain,
For my lord the king
Will pardon you for his wrath and his ire,
So kind and good is he.”

Thus does Alexander successfully promote feudal submission as a means of moderating and appeasing Arthur's anger, and his influence inserts mercy into royal justice, staving off the tyranny that simmers just below the surface of the earlier execution sequence.

There is no question that Chrétien deliberately revises the final crisis that implodes the otherwise paradigmatic reign of Geoffrey's Arthur, deleting adultery, incest, and regicide from the story of rebellion in *Cligés*. Yet throughout the first third of the romance, Chrétien nonetheless renders suspect the shining reputation of Arthurian Britain, revealing fundamental weaknesses that threaten to erode the ostensive values of the king's rule. Feudal submission eventually begets royal mercy, whether from Arthur or *Amors*. Even so the excessive violence of both overlords demands internal regulation from the nobility. Royal insular authority, in other words, is decidedly not the ideology in operation, and in the instance of the surrender of Windsor Castle,

the vassal-king relationship thrives only through the mediation of Alexander the Greek. Baronial intercession proves essential to the maintenance of social order, showing Arthur's kingship to be effective only when exercised in tandem with the values of his chief foreign knight. The Arthur of *Cligés* has been discussed as a flattering literary embodiment of Henry II; he seems instead to represent a danger to British kingship, both requiring and conforming to the active, regulatory intervention of a largely foreign barony.

LOVE AND LAND IN *YVAIN AND IARLLES*

Beneath the surface of Arthur's lavish generosity and military might—hallmarks of the Galfridian model of kingship—Chrétien's first two romances celebrate baronial intercession into the political institution of monarchy. Already in *Erec et Enide*, the romance narrative decentralizes Arthur's court to prioritize instead heroic, knightly adventure, culminating in a coronation that fuses in King Erec the social roles of knight and king. *Yvain* continues this program of minimizing the role of kingship within noble society, building upon and intensifying the subtle criticisms of Arthur's rule that are integral to the opening sequences of *Erec*, *Gereint*, and *Cligés*. Yet our hero-type has changed. Yvain's complex route to becoming the independent *châtelain* of the Fountain depends as much on Arthur's absence from the opening sequence as on his own evasive desertion of the king's court. What is more, Yvain's final acquisition of both love and land casts a pall over the poem's conclusion that contrasts notably with the joy of Erec's coronation. *Yvain* thus marks a shift not only in Chrétien's depiction of kingship, but in his portrait of aristocratic society in general.

Yvain shares with *Erec* a general narrative pattern of quest, and both heroes ultimately acquire wife and fief that remove them from Arthur's court. But comparisons between the two heroes (certainly between Chrétien's initial portraits of them) might well stop there. Rather than Erec's unexplained exclusion from the White Stag hunt, explicit if childish discontent impels Yvain. While *li baron et li bachelor* want a group expedition to the fountain, Yvain is not so pleased by the king's proposal to take *tote la corz* (673–76): *Mes qui qu'an soit liez et joianz,/ mes sire Yvains anju dolanz,/... si fu destroiz et angoisseus del roi, qui aler i doit* (but however much they were happy and joyful, my lord Yvain was upset, ... he was unhappy and distraught about the king, who would go [to the fountain], 677–81). Yvain is so upset, in fact, that he flees court surreptitiously, at night even, setting out alone to seek the family vengeance he fears Arthur will leave to Keu or Gauvain—

Por ce seulmant li grevoit
qu'il savoit bien que la bataille
avroit mes sire Kex, sanz faille,
... ou mes sire Gauvains.... (682–87).

For this reason alone he sulked:

for he knew well that Keu, without fail,
would have the battle ...,
or my lord Gauvain....

Absent here is the outrage roused by Arthur's wish to revive ancient custom. In this instance the king's proposal to seek the adventure of the fountain delights every knight but Yvain, who had hoped to go alone (665; 677–79). Yvain's petulant defiance is not representative of the group; even less can his nocturnal flight be considered an antidote to unpopular royal decree. Instead, Yvain reacts in secret against the social organization that ranks him third behind the king's nephew and the seneschal. Though in later episodes of the narrative he will both defeat Keu and equal Gauvain in single combat,⁴² the decision to slink off to the fountain “by his own will” (*son vuel*, 693) negatively differentiates Yvain from the other romance heroes discussed in this chapter. So let us turn to the initial descriptions of both king and court that mark the exaggerated social degeneration of Chrétien's *Yvain*.

The royal nap sequence of *Yvain* develops in stark contrast to the opening lines of the romance. Not only do the first lines commingle King Arthur and the Emperor Charlemagne in a conscious recollection of the first line of the *Chanson de Roland*⁴³—*Carles li rets, nostre empereres magnes*—but they moreover identify Arthur's *proesce* as the source of his society's bravery and courtesy:

Arms, li boens rois de Bretaingne
la cui proesce nos enseigne
que nos soiens preu et cortois.... (1–3)

The good King Arthur of Britain,
whose valor teaches us
to be brave and courtly....

Thus, to quote Haidu, “exemplarity devolves from the political institution of kingship” (“Romance” 9). Yet subsequent lines immediately reveal another source of communal valor, a font not only of the court's courtesy and bravery but also of its generosity and honor, and Arthur's singular example temporarily coalesces with that of *Amors*. As Love's disciples (*li deciple de son covant*, 16), the knights and ladies of Arthur's court once *se feisoient cortois clamer/ et preu et large et enorable* ... (called themselves courteous, and noble and generous and honorable, 22–23). This is not *Cligés*, however, where the pair of Arthur and *Amors* vies for control over the narrative action. Here, at the outset of *Yvain*, the highpoint of Love's rule has already past. Chrétien underscores this purposeful temporal “confusion” not only with the conjunction *mes* but with the adverb *or* (Grimbert 16–17):⁴⁴

... mes or i a molt po des suens
qu'a bien pres l'ont ja tuit lessiee,
s'an est Amors molt abessiee.... (18–20)

... but today there are very few disciples:
almost all have abandoned him,
and Love is greatly abased....

Love is now an idle word, a lie, and his adherents false: ... *or est Amors torneé a fable/ por ce que cil qui rien n'en santent/ dient qu'il aiment, mes il mantent...* (now Love is reduced to fables, for those who know nothing about it claim that they love, but they lie, 24–26). Though at one time in a glorious past the court's valor and honor stemmed jointly from Arthur and *Amors*, the courtly society of today rejects Love's service. By implication, Arthur's preeminence *come rois* is in equal decline, and initial lines of the text set up the expectation that the age of Arthur's dominion over his “disciples” is now past.

Even so, Chrétien's narrator encourages us to enter with him this former world of chivalric excellence: *Mes orparlons de cez qui furent,/ si leissons cez qui ancor durent ...* (But now let us speak of those who were, and leave those who are still here, 29–30). He insists, like a Breton, on the immortal fame of Arthur and his worthy knights:

Por ce me plect a raconter
chose qui face a escouter
del roi qui fu de tel tesmoing
qu'an en parole et pres et loing;
si m'acort de tant as Bretons
que toz jorz durra li renons
et par lui sont amenteu
li boen chevalier esleü
qui a enor se traveillierent. (33–41)

For it is my pleasure to tell
something that merits being heard
about a king of such fame
that people still speak of him both near and far;
and I agree with the Bretons
that his fame will last for all time
and that through him are remembered
the good, select knights
who strove for honor.

Twelfth-century belief in Arthur provoked the scorn of at least one contemporary insular writer,⁴⁵ and the “agreement” of Chrétien's narrator treats with irony tales of the ostensibly unending age of Arthurian glory. The first forty-one lines of *Yvain* twice repeat an ironic reversal of Arthur's exemplary kingship. Not only are the Charlemagne-esque King Arthur and his court of loyal Love servants but today's false vassals of an abased ruler; Arthur's fame is also misguided Breton belief.

Indeed, though Arthur's active engagement at plenary occasions initiates the pattern of heroic progression that structures *Erec*, *Gereint*, and *Cligés*, here in *Yvain* it is the king's exit from the tale that inaugurates narrative

action. To again quote Haidu, “the first narrative event of the text is the exclusion from the field of political relevance of the figure of the king ...” (“Romance” 42). The moment Chrétien zooms in for a closer look at Arthur's Pentecost feast in Carlisle, the *roi qui fu de tel tesmoing* takes unprecedented leave of the company of his knights. With yet another jolting *mes*, Chrétien intensifies the distance between the ideal of lines 33–41 and the reality of *cel jor*:

Mes eel jor molt se merveillierent
del roi qui eincois se leva,
si ot de tex cui molt greva
et qui molt grant parole an firent,
por ce que onques mes nel virent
a si grant feste an chanbre antrer
por dormir ne por reposer.... (42–48).

But on that day [Arthur's knights] were astounded
that the king got up [and left] so early,
and some of them were greatly offended
and spoke of it at length,
for they had never seen,
at so great a feast, [the king] go into his room
to sleep or rest....

Dalliance with his queen, and a subsequent nap, explain Arthur's slight:

... la reine le detint,
si demora tant delez li
qu'il s'oblia et endormi (50–2).

... the queen detained him, he stayed so long by her side
that he forgot himself and fell asleep.

This absence, perceived as neglect by his surprised, offended court, breeds a sentiment of ill will that soon erupts into verbal melee. Keu (*ranponeus/fel et poignanz et venimeus*, 69–70) hurls insults at Calogrenant (71–85) and Yvain (590–611); Calogrenant responds in kind (107–123). Though hers is the calm voice of advice in *Erec et Enide* and *Gereint*, the queen's vitriolic retorts here rival even Keu's spiteful slander (86–91; 612–629). This verbal violence carries over into both Calogrenant's shame-tale and Yvain's ensuing flight. Keu's taunt of all-talk-and-no-action may not be borne out by Yvain's sneaky departure, but Arthur's court nonetheless proves to be riddled not only with contention but with knightly failure. The feast of Pentecost, celebrating the birthday of the Church and commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, adds a cynical framework to this acerbic and perverse version of social community. The civil war of *Cligés* has moved indoors, and the *Cligés* King Arthur—excessive but still active—here dozes while the cohesion of his immortally famed society disintegrates.

The king's exit and nap markedly upset the court dynamic that managed

in *Erec* and *Cligés* to balance unpopular power and royal excess with the temperance and counsel of worthy knights. The roughly 600 lines that make up the *longue demore* of the king's absence reveal past failure as well as petty, spiteful infighting between his dependents (651). The degeneration of Arthur in *Yvain*, or at least the intensified narrative marginalization of his role as central authority, has significantly negative repercussions on Chrétien's vision of courtly society in general. Absent king clearly jeopardizes courtly world; yet Chrétien's critique of kingship is not a revolutionary call to replace monarchy with baronial or knightly rule. *Yvain* instead underscores the inherent danger, to all tiers of aristocratic society, of distance and rift between a king and his baron-knights.

Arthur does in fact nap through the volley of insults exchanged in the opening sequence. Distracted and tired, he prefers bed to his role as the arbiter of this opening sequence, a gesture that anticipates his later attendance at the more popular court of Yvain and Gauvain. By that point in the romance, Arthur's fame and the physical hub of his royal court have been eclipsed by his knights' successes:

... li dui chevalier ansamble ...
einz firent lor paveillon tendre
fors de la vile et cort i tindrent
c'onques a cort de roi ne vindrent,
einçois vint li rois a la lor,
car avoec ax sont li meillor
des chevaliers, et toz li plus. (2688–95)

... the two knights together ...
had their pavilions pitched
outside of town, and they held court there,
because they never went to the king's court,
the king instead came to theirs,
since with them were the best
of knights, and more of them.

Arthur will continue to spectate these two champion knights, even when the romance eventually affords the king an active social role—that of lawgiver.

Settling the inheritance dispute between the Blackthorn sisters might well be Arthur's only active role in *Yvain*, and it grants him a singular moment of control, an occasion to *etabli*r judicial procedure and take a front seat with regard to Yvain and Gauvain. The eldest Blackthorn sister puts it succinctly: “*Biax sire rois, vospoez établir voz lois/tex con vosplest et boen vos iert...*” (“Good lord king, you can establish your laws as you please and according to your will,” 4799–4801). When Arthur's clever linguistic trick entraps the eldest sister into admitting her own guilt, the king fully fulfills his expected role as exemplary source of social unity. “*Or vos an metez sor moi*,” “Arthur says reassuringly (leave everything to me, 6369), and the acuity of his verbal play in this scene has been fittingly described as “Solomonic” (Haidu,

“Narrativity and Language” 143; “La Valeur” 261). Yet wise royal judgment comes late in this sequence, only after the fierce but stalemated battle between Yvain and Gauvain fails to yield a victor. Arthur's justice in this way avoids his implicit authority as intercessor to rely foremost on the haphazard and potentially tragic outcome of trial by combat. The narrator in fact offers criticism of Arthur's adherence to the combat custom, expressing his own fear that, far from justice, the trial by combat will yield only *let* (harm, 6091) and *honte* (humiliation, 6091): *grantpeor ai qu'il ne maintaignent/tant la bataille et la mesleel qu'il soit de l'une part oltree* (I am deeply afraid that [Gauvain and Yvain] will continue the battle and the fight until one of them is defeated, 6086–88). Just as Arthur had proved willing to risk internal court strife by re-instituting the White Stag Custom at the outset of *Erec et Enide*, so too here, in the penultimate episode of *Yvain*, does King Arthur sit back and wait for arbitration destined to maim, if not kill, at least one of his two chief knights (Maddox, *ARCdT* 75–78). Once again Chrétien successfully transfers onto Arthur's kingship the worst kind of arbitrariness, that of inaction in the face of outdated and dangerous custom. It is not the knights who seem out-of-line in this episode, despite their previous break with Arthur and their establishment of a rival and superior court; they seem rather victims of bad procedure and of the king's inactivity.

As in *Erec*, the romance heartily criticizes the king's reluctance to override socially deleterious custom, and the savage nature of combat between Gauvain and Yvain calls into question the enforcement of such bloody judicial procedure. Chrétien describes the battle in graphic detail, relating how the two knights, bruised and bloody, their eyes bulging from their heads, ex-change savage blows and struggle to knock each other's brains out (6107–42). As the spectators put it, “*Ne se combatent mie a geus,/einz le font asez trop a certes*” (They are not fighting in jest, but in all seriousness, 6154–5). The connection between the two champions—peers in the Arthurian elite, their names intertwined by rhyme—is ironically threatened from within; Arthur can stop the combat but opts against such action.

Heightening the absurdity, *Yvain* also repeatedly insists on the evil criminality of the eldest sister's cause. Her champion is indeed the strong and worthy Gauvain; but her sister has God and right on her side (“*Dex et li droiz que je i ai,*” 5977). She herself is described alternately as *male criature* (cruel creature, 6184), *la dameisele.../qui sa seror desheritoit* (the maiden who had disinherited her sister, 5839–40), and as *la dameisele qui tort aj vers sa seror, trop desapert* (the maiden whose wrong toward her sister was quite evident, 5878–80). Gauvain too recognizes the injustice of the eldest sister's case, and he agrees to champion her only on condition of secrecy:

Mes tel covant entr'ax avoit
que se nus par li le [son plet] savoit,
ja puis ne s'armeroit por li;
et ele l'otroia ensi. (4727–30)

But the agreement between them was
that if she told anyone about [her claim],
he would never take up arms on her behalf;
and she agreed to that.

The girl's merciless press for battle, based not on the Tightness of her claim but on her confidence in Gauvain's superior might,⁴⁶ turns the entire court against her:

Mes l'ainz nee estoit si anrievre
que nes la reïne Ganievre
et cil qui savoient lor lois
et li chevalier et li rois
devers la mains nee se tienent. (6167–71)

But the eldest sister was so obstinate
that even Queen Guenievre,
the legal experts,
the knights, and the king
supported the younger lady.

Everybody begs Arthur to stop the battle and impose a verdict (6172–80); Gauvain petitions the king more indirectly, proffering his defeat on the grounds that he backed the wrong side:

“... par mon chief, il [Yvain] m'eüst mort
par sa proesce, et par le tort
celi qui m'avoit el champ mis.” (6339–41)

... by my head, [Yvain] would have killed me
because of his strength, and because of the wrongful cause
of the woman who had me as her champion.

Court and champion all urge the king to exert his authority, to override the legal procedure that compels a knight both to wage war against a peer and *desresnier* on behalf of a criminal cause.

As the romance and the king make abundantly clear, Arthur too has long realized the girl's guilt,⁴⁷ and he openly supports *le droit* and *la desheritee* (the disinherited girl, 5811): ... *devers Hilde la querele sepandoitjpor ce que au droit entandoit* (in the quarrel he sided with her, to uphold what was right, 5922–24). Yet, in opposition to both the opinion of the romance and the expressed fear of the narrator, in spite of the pleas of his entire court and in spite of his own assessment of the case, Arthur refuses to intervene into the system of customary justice: *Et li rois dit que de la pes/ne s'antremetra il ja mes* (And the king said that he would never intercede to bring about peace, 6181–2). He does not consider it an option, in other words, to stop the battle and impose a royal verdict in favor of the younger sister. When Arthur finally plays his verbal ruse (6378–85), then, and claims a commitment to justice—*c'onques de tortfeire n'oi cure* (I never wanted to be unjust, 6398)—he seems

less like a wise arbitrator than a hesitant and reluctant bystander at the mercy of an ineffective system. His ruling, moreover, seems equally ineffective. Liberally benefiting the guilty party, Arthur hardly saves the day for Right: he demands the immediate reinvestment of the younger sisters share, but then inexplicably strips her of dominion, making her her sister's *fame*, her liegewoman and vassal (6432–37). Arthur thus “settles” the matter—*li rois einsi la chose mainne*, 6438—by leaving *la pucele* in a similar state of vulnerability to and dependence upon a woman shown repeatedly by the romance to be a *male criature*. Self-stymied by an unflagging adherence to a procedure of judicial combat that clearly does not work, Arthur in this sequence erodes the force of his own sovereign justice, accommodating the longevity of trial by combat as a viable process of arbitration. Both the customary system and the king are shown here to be questionable instruments of justice.

Romance inherently subordinates the role of the king to the episodic progression of a hero, and in *Yvain* this narrative subordination becomes the almost complete absence of King Arthur. Arthur's brand of regalian power causes courtly anxiety in the previous tales, and calls to mind the changing relationships between kings and nobles that defined twelfth- and thirteenth-century political reality on both sides of the Channel. But in *Yvain* Chrétien offers little alternative to Arthur's rule. Gone, in other words, is the corrective mediation of the Gauvain of *Erec* and the Alexander of *Cligés*, and in the absence of any royal prerogative the universe of *Yvain* functions by brute force of arms. Even in his late verdict against the eldest Blackthorn sister, Arthur relies not on his words but on the principles of *force* and *crieme* (fear):

... il s'est aparceüz molt bien
que ele ne l'en randist rien
por quan que dire li seüst
se force ou crieme n'i eüst. (6419-22)

... [Arthur] realized very well
that she would restore nothing [of her sister's inheritance],
because of what he said
but because of force or fear.

A similar display of superior strength comprises the “lordship” wielded by the *vilain* of Calogrenant's tale (342–67); the same principle of “might makes right” governs Yvain's successes in combat and secures his eventual reacquisition of the Fountain realm (Maddox, *ARCdT* 55–6, 60–1; Haidu, “Romance” 27–33). The threat of force also justifies, as we have seen, Arthur's belated intervention into the judicial dispute of the Blackthorn sisters.

Joy proves conspicuously absent from this world of rule-by-force. The romance concludes with the reconciliation of hero and wife as the autonomous couple of a feudal castellany, but it steers clear of the type of

lavish plenary feast that celebrates Erec's rise in Arthurian society to the rank of knight-king. Political autonomy in *Yvain* proves ambiguously isolating in comparison (Haidu, "Narrativity" 146), and though serial combat helps Yvain rebuild his blighted status as knight, the "honor" he acquires is never anything but what he wins by the rule of brute force. The hero-*châtelain* is but the enemy of whoever seeks the adventure of his fountain: *c'uns sens horn le puet envair,/et tormanter, et traveillier* (for a single man can invade and assault and lay it waste, 6544–45). The romance in fact defines Yvain's final *pes* (peace, 6769, 6783, 6789, 6801) precisely in terms of an amnesiac love that strips him of all other social memory:

Molt an est a boen chief venuz
qu'il est amez et chier tenuz
de sa dame, et ele de lui.
Ne li sovient or de nelui
que par la joie l'antroblié
que il a de sa dolce amie. (6793–98).

Everything has ended well
now that [Yvain] is loved and held dear
by his lady, and she by him.
He now remembered nobody else
because the joy he had in his sweet beloved
made him forget.

Thus the social outlook of *Yvain* is bleak, at best ambiguous, and there is no shelter from the violent future facing the independent noble realm of the tale's conclusion. Neither the absence of the king nor the single instance of his sovereign justice alleviates the brutality of this vision of the courtly world, no more so than the gradual accrual of social worth or the acquisition of an independent realm. A need for more effective balance between royal power and nobility seems the message here. Staging the socially isolating and disruptive effects of an ideology of force, *Yvain* questions Arthurs too-passive kingship as well as its over-active warrior class.

Ignoring for the moment that the final line and modern title of the Welsh tale divert attention away from the heroic knight to focus instead on the Lady of the Fountain,⁴⁸ we can say that much like *Yvain*, *Iarlles y Ffynnwawn* heightens a sense of royal decline despite a general narrative assumption of an Arthurian ideal. Arthur, for instance, is both king and *amherawdyr* (emperor, I).⁴⁹ Material goods such as the bed made up for Owein are deemed *dahet* (excellent) only in so far as they prove *gwiw y Arthur* (worthy of Arthur, 334–5). And Luned expresses the grave reality of her lady's predicament in terms of a high Arthurian standard: "*Ony elly di gynnal y ffynnwawn ny elly gynnal dy gyuoeth. Ny eillkynnal y ffynnwawn namyn vn o teulu Arthur*" (unless you can defend the fountain you cannot defend your domain; no one but a member of Arthur's warband can defend the fountain, 413–15). The Middle Welsh word *teulu*, however, is a word that shifts ambiguously in meaning between

warband and domestic household. Its use in the context of *rhamant* distances this Arthurian crowd quite noticeably from the “batde and booze” ethos of the warrior *teulu* of contemporary court poetry (Owen, “Arbennic” 91), calling ironic attention to the demilitarized character of the king’s inner circle.⁵⁰ Demilitarized, and moreover lacking in the titled officials that elsewhere give structure, discipline, and rank to the king’s retinue. Although Glewlwyd Gualaeluawr is “acting porter” (*ar ureint porthawr*, 6), there is no permanent porter in Arthur’s court (*porthaivr... nyt oedyr vn*, 5); Cei clearly plays the role of steward and yet is never dignified by the title *distein*; and perhaps some of the court’s failure and shame might be explained by the absence of a *pennteulu* (captain of the warband).⁵¹ As if to heighten the absence of group cohesion, *Iarlles* initially introduces Arthur’s *teulu* as being reluctantly dependent on its king. Arthur initiates a program of economic exchange meant to maintain court harmony in his absence, but his system instead plays his *teulu* off of itself: it is not the king’s unexpected departure that causes ill will in this scene, but rather the forced exchange between Arthur’s men. The king withdraws from the company of his knights in the opening lines of the tale, promising (*adaw*) that Cei will serve mead and chops for the fee of an entertaining story (*yr ymdidan da*, 18), a promise that Cei refuses to fulfill without first receiving his payment (17–21). Storytelling is indeed “owed” (*pieu*) Cei, who demands his due: “*chwitheu bieu talu minneu uyymdidan*” (pay me my story that is owed, 25–6). “Payment” (*tal*) is then rendered by Arthur’s knight Cynon, but only after being twice ordered by Owain to pay the debt: “*tal [di] y ymdidan y Gei!*” (pay Cei the story!, 26, 28).

The social complex of Arthur’s court operates only precariously in the king’s absence, and through an economic tenet of service-for-hire the Welsh tale portrays a royal retinue that is dependent on its king, yet hesitatingly so. Such is decidedly not a typical portrait of the strong contemporary Welsh aristocracies described by Rees Davies as overseeing and virtually controlling Welsh kingship, a system in which “[Welsh] Kings were often made, controlled, and deposed by such [strong] aristocracies; indeed, on occasion, a king appears to be little more than a chairman ...” (*FEE* 100-01). The *rhamant* world and the payment-driven members of Arthur’s *teulu* may more closely reflect a reluctant and culturally damaging adherence to distant overlordship such as that wielded in Wales by English kings. As in *Yvain*, *Iarlles* opens with a sequence that underscores not only a faulty order of regalian power, but also a faulty and ultimately damaging recognition of that rule. *Iarlles* thus very much participates in a romance program of questioning kingship, but the Welsh tale does so with a separate audience in mind: the aristocratic communities of Welsh princes forced to exchange services with foreign English overlordship.

The tale that constitutes Cynon’s payment to Cei reveals long unavenged shame (31–218), an outstanding debt in terms of honor price that mars the high repute of Arthur’s *teulu*. Though he does not employ the same economic

language used in the opening lines, Cynon articulates the value deficit incurred by the warband as a whole: "*A Duw a wyr, Gei, nat adeuawd dyn arnaw e hun chwedyl vethedigach no hwnn eiryoet;... a bod defnydy chwedyl htunn yg kyfoeth yr amherawdyr Arthur heb dywanu neb amaw*" (God knows, Ceï, that no man has ever confessed to a story of greater failure; ... and the cause of this story [i.e., the fountain] exists within the domains of the emperor Arthur without any man ever coming upon it, 213–18). The warband not only shares the shame (*kywilyd*, 200) of Cynon's defeat but is implicated in a much larger failure to secure and conquer every inch of the emperor-king's domain.

The opening sequence of *Iarlles* affords additional insight into the makeup of the warband, shedding increasingly damaging light on the community of the king's adherents in general and on the reputation of the hero in particular. In this respect, *Iarlles* and *Yvain* both mark a distinctly critical decline in the overall standard of Arthurian society. Ceï's exchange of sarcastic insults with Owein and the queen strips of heroic force Owein's plan for immediate redress of Cynon's failure. Ceï seems to have heard similar boasts from Owein before: "*Mynn llaw vyg kyfeillt,*" *heb y Kei*, "*mynych y dywedut ar dy dauawt yr hynnybeth nys gwnelut ar dy weithret*" (By the hand of my friend, said Ceï, often has your tongue spoken what you would not do in deed, 220–22). Such "slandrous talk" (*ymadrawd mor warthaedic*, 223) is evidently familiar at court, and Ceï wryly reminds the queen of her own "high regard" for our hero: "*Myn llaw vyg kyfeillt, wreicda,*" *heb y Kei*, "*nyt mwy o volyanty Owein a dywedeist di no minneu*" (By the hand of my friend, lady, said Ceï, you have spoken no greater praise of Owein than I have, 224–25). Mordant insults here take the place of a diplomatic mediator, accentuating the tale's less than heroic cousins: Cynon, a failed knight, and Owein, infamous for talk rather than for deed. *Iarlles* opens like *Yvain* with a comparatively negative portrait of an absent king and his spiteful *teulu*, more mercenaries than unified warband, unfamiliar with Arthur's realm, and notorious for empty boast and inactivity.

Association with the world of Arthur's court, in other words, destroys and renders ineffectual the strength and unity of a native Welsh *teulu*, and the primary aim of the *rhamant* is precisely the distancing of Owein from this world. As in *Yvain*, Arthur's absence from the opening sequence marks another striking development in the progressive decline of kingship that occurs over the course of these eight texts. Arthur remains ignorant of the failure and dishonor that blight his retinue because, risking the ridicule of his men, he has excused himself for a nap: "*Ha wyr, pei n'am goganewch,*" *heb ef*, "*mi a gyskwn tra uewnyn aros vy mwyt*" (Men, if you will not make fun of me, said [Arthur], I will sleep while I wait for my food, 13–14). The questionability of the king's act is implied in the possibility of *goganu* (mockery); a similar questionability materializes in Cynon's tale of collective failure as in the aggressive bickering between Owein, Ceï, and the queen that later wakes Arthur up—comically disoriented after his 200 or so lines of

dozing: *Ac ar hynny deffroi a oruc Arthur, a gofyn a gysgassei hayach* (and at that Arthur awoke, and asked if he had slept for long, 226–7). Just as in the French romance, the remainder of *Iarllles* repairs Owein's reputation by temporarily removing him from the contention and failure of Arthur's court. Once beyond the king's orbit he wins, and learns to keep and protect, his own discrete realm of the fountain. Different from Chretien's romance, however, *Iarllles* concludes with the happy ending of warrior epic—ever-successful battle—rather than with the isolated wedded bliss of *Yvain*. Both the *Iarllles* and the Fountain domain are notably absent from the final lines.⁵² Foregrounded instead is the prestige Owein earns as *pennteulu* of Arthur's court; and then, more importantly, focus turns to Owein's own lands and the successes of his own heavily armed *teulu*:

Ac Owein a trigywys yn llys Arthur o hynny allann yn pennteulu, ac yn annwyl idaw, yny aeth ar yn gyfoeth e hun. Sef oed hynny trychant cledyf Kenuerchyn a'r vranhes. Ac y'r He yd elei Owein a hynny gantaw, goruot a wnaei. (817–21)

And Owein remained at Arthur's court from then on, as captain of his warband, and loved by him, until he went to his own lands, where there were the three hundred swords of the Cenferchyn and his band of ravens. And wherever Owein went, and they with him, he would be victorious.

Kynuarch is Owein's grandfather, and Thomson suggests in his edition that the Cenferchyn refers collectively to Owein's descendants (61–2n820); thus part of his “possessions” consists of 300 sword-wielding kinsmen. In *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* (The Dream of Rhonabwy), Owein's ravens seem to be a standing army (e.g. 12:24, 13:19–20, 14:14–18, 15:4–8); here, combined with the swords of the Cenferchyn, the ravens suggest a second armed retinue. When Owein finally decides to retire as Arthur's war captain and “depart for his own lands,” he assumes dominion with substantial military strength—substantially more strength, wielded with substantially greater success than that exhibited by Arthur's court at the outset of the tale. At a time when material insular overlordship could hardly be accused of “napping” on the job in Wales, the Arthurian world of *Iarllles* gets supplanted by Owein's superior *teulu*, as if to suggest that native strength and perpetual victory are to be gained outside the reach of royal jurisdiction.

LANCELOT: KNIGHT AS SOCIETAL SAVIOR

The adulterous love⁵³ between Lancelot and Queen Guenievre, resulting from Lancelot's obsessive and often ridiculous fidelity to a liege lord other than Arthur—*Amors*⁵⁴—adds to the inherent ambiguity of a romance whose hero is both active and hesitant, both the standard of knightly superiority and a traitor to his king, the liberator and savior of the people of Logres, cowardly cart-rider (*chevalier de la charrete*) and would-be victim of suicide.⁵⁵ The narrative fact of the hero's sexual betrayal indeed intensifies the negative shift in the

image of Arthur made so prominent in *Yvain* and *Iarllles*, branding an already marginalized king with the additional mark of a cuckold.⁵⁶ The order and integrity of the court is violated and deceived by two trusted members of the royal household, and Chretien thus ties the waning institution of Arthur's kingship to what, in *Lancelot*, is an equally ambiguous treatment of heroic knighthood.⁵⁷

Yet, as part of the elite warrior nobility of Arthurian romance, Lancelot joins other select heroes in defending, preserving, and extending the king's realm. Lancelot's fidelity to *Amors* and his love for Guenievre might conflict with his role as Arthur's knight, but adultery never mars or diminishes his narrative superiority as hero. The narrator describes at length the night of love shared between knight and queen (4583-4721), but keeps resolutely silent as to any negative judgment: *Mes tozjorz iert par moi teüe,/ qu'an conte ne doit ester dite* (But for all time [their joy] will be kept secret by me, for [such details] have no place in the story, 4680-81). The crime, when leveled against an innocent Keu, proves serious indeed, and is deemed a dire betrayal of Arthur (4834, 4854), a hideous offense (*leidure*; *torz*, 4864) and a despicable disgrace (*grant descovenue*, 4887; *honte*, 4888). Such criminal dishonor never touches Lancelot directly, however. Our hero remains without peer (*onques voird'ome.../... qui cestui vausist*, 1978, 1980; *nus a lui nes'aparoille*, 2241), the sole knight capable of releasing Arthur's people from exile and captivity.⁵⁸ As much as any other Arthurian hero, Lancelot belongs to the dominant stratum of the romance world that defends and maintains Arthurian society in the narrative absence of strong, regalian authority. Royal prerogative here saves the realm only indirectly, by proving the social necessity of a roaming class of Arthurian knights. Rather than the specific act of the hero's adultery, what primarily interests me is the crime's overall insignificance to Lancelot's role as the social deliverer of Arthur's domain.

Chrétien leaves unspecified the location of the sumptuous Ascension Day feast that opens *Lancelot*⁵⁹ and this omission quickly serves to accentuate an impression that Arthur is losing specific hold over his domain. The celebration is interrupted by the boasts of an unknown, fully armed knight who addresses the king without formal greeting—*nelsaluapas* (he did not greet him, 50). This knight, later identified as prince Meleaganz of Gorre, presents himself boldly and confidently as a political rival with an upper hand over Arthur:

“Rois Arms, j'ai en ma prison,
de ta terre et de ta meison,
chevaliers, dames et puceles....” (51–53)

King Arthur, I have in my prison
knights, ladies, and maidens
of your territory and your household....

Not only does Arthur's domestic space prove accessible to his enemies. His

greater domain is equally menaced by and unprotected from invasion. More serious, however, is Meleaganz's taunting declaration of Arthur's inability to offer resistance:

“... mes ne t'an di pas les noveles
por ce que jes te vuelle randre;
encoïs te voel dire et aprandre
que tu n'as force ne avoir
par quoi tu les puisses avoir;
et saches bien qu'ainsi morras
que ja aidier ne lor porras.” (54–60)

But I do not bring you the news
because I intend to release them to you;
I want rather to tell you and make you aware
that you do not have the force or the wealth
to rule them;
and know well that you will die
before you will ever help them.

Holding untold members of Arthur's household in prison, this rival has already dissolved the integrity of Arthur's rule and effectively nullified the validity of the king's protection—revealing an ongoing threat to the realm that Arthur meekly accepts: *Li rois respont quil li estuetl sofrir, s'amander ne lepuet* (the king replied that he had to suffer what he could not change, 61–2). Meleaganz takes full advantage of Arthur's acquiescence, boldly announcing his intention of winning the queen by force, and, by implication, the kingdom as well:⁶⁰

“Rois, s'a ta cort chevalier a
nes un an cui tu te fïasses
que la reine li osasses
baillier por mener an ce bois
après moi, la ou ge m'an vois,
par un covant l'i atandrai
que les prisons toz te randrai
qui sont an prison an ma terre,
se il la puet vers moi conquerre
et tant face qu'il Tan ramaint.” (70–79)

King, if there is at your court
a single knight you would
dare entrust with the queen,
to lead [her] into this wood
after me where I am going,
on my oath I will await him there,
and I will release all the captives
imprisoned in my land
if he can win her from me
and bring her back [to you].

The liberty and safety of his courtly realm thus placed at the mercy of single combat, King Arthur proves subject to the social order over which he nominally presides. Not only are upper and lower tiers of nobility coalesced in the heroic knights of romance, but similarly leveled out is what Georges Duby has termed the “necessary inequality” of feudal society. In this world of Arthurian romance, Meleaganz legitimately rivals the king, and his challenge to Arthur's queen and household not only disrupts the “universal hierarchy” that situates kings above lesser lords, it also sets the stage for Lancelot's narrative role as a stand-in for the king (Duby, *Knight* 215).⁶¹

Turmoil ensues at court—*s'an fu la corz tote estormie*, 81—and Arthur's political crisis is immediately compounded by internal trickery and verbal ruse. Feigning anger (*come par ire*, 86), Keu disengages himself from Arthur's service and withdraws his fealty (87–92), a manipulative revocation of his feudal contract that compels Arthur, *molt desperé* (in desperation, 114), to seek the queen's intervention on his behalf. Throwing herself prostrate at Keu's feet, the queen indeed convinces the seneschal to remain in Arthur's service, but only with the promise that Arthur will grant, in advance, his any request. Hustling a “rash boon” from both the king and the queen,⁶² Keu railroads Arthur into surrendering Guenievre—and the future of the realm—to the most inept and anti-heroic member of his court.⁶³ The narrative progress of *Lancelot* indeed depends on Keu's managed control over this scene. Yet, far from the similar linguistic traps set in *Yvain*, for example, where the manipulations of both Arthur and Lunette serve ultimately to enforce the social structure of the poem,⁶⁴ *Lancelot* here inverts court hierarchy with the “monumental crisis” that puts Keu in charge (Maddox, *ARCdT* 41).

Gauvain privately chastises the king for honoring Keu's request—“*Sire, fet il, molt grant anfancel avez faite ...*” (Lord, he said, you have acted like a child, 226–7)—advising his uncle that the two of them together should follow Keu and the queen. Although Lancelot remains absent from this initial sequence, he enters the narrative as an anonymous *chevalier* soon after Keu's defeat (271),⁶⁵ replacing Arthur as Gauvains co-pursuer.⁶⁶ Disappearing from the narrative action, the king thus passively initiates both the couple and the adultery that, in later tradition, will implode the social world of his court. Here, however, the romance culminates not in condemnation of the hero but with the communal elation caused by his victory over Meleaganz:

Li rois et tuit cil qui i sont
grant joie an demainnent et font.
Lancelot desarment adonques
cil qui plus lié an furent onques,
si l'en ont mené a grant joie. (7093–97)

The king and all who were there
displayed great joy.
Then, happier than they had ever been,
they removed Lancelot's armor,

If the cloud of adultery seems to strip the romance of narrative closure, rendering the hero so ambiguous as to defy interpretation (Bruckner, "Interpreter's Dilemma" 160), it is equally the case that Lancelot's conclusive defeat of Meleaganz, along with the consequent abolition of the Custom of Gorre and the liberation of Arthur's queen and realm, confirms at the poem's end Arthur's sociopolitical dependence on the powerful, heroic elite of his select knights.⁶⁷ Though the nature and values of knighthood have indeed changed in *Lancelot*, and the hero here acts foremost in the service of *Amors* rather than in the service of Arthur or Logres (Maddox, *ARCdT* 52), the greater social world of Arthurian romance is nonetheless ordered and protected by his knightly action.

With scholars such as Duggan (315) and Bloch (*MFL* 196–97), I agree that the ambiguity of heroic conduct leaves room for a discussion of Chrétien's literary moralization of knighthood as a social institution. In the case of *Lancelot*, however, the question of the hero's morality or immorality seems at best secondary to his successful deliverance of Arthur's realm. From the outset, external hostility exposes sovereign vulnerability, and *Lancelot* reduces Arthur to a rivaled, threatened, and deceived king whose society survives despite his rule. Whereas the narrative progression of *Erec*, *Gereint*, *Yvain*, and *Iarlls* culminates in the heroic acquisition of both wife and independent territory beyond Arthur's court, knightly prowess in *Lancelot* homes in on and secures the king's wife and realm, creating an integral, sanctioned space for the heroic knight within the most intimate core of Arthur's kingship. Such a skewed and unbalanced inversion of feudal power makes the King Arthur of *Lancelot* decidedly unlike the twelfth-century monarchs of France and England. More powerfully than the concluding images of a magnificent King Erec or an autonomous *châlain* Yvain, Chrétien closes here with the vision of a savior knight who displaces Arthur himself to perform the unifying social function of the king. For the Champagne elite, then, Chrétien again imagines a world in which a knight's values and interests, no matter how much at odds with those of the king, do not upset the social need for a mounted and heroic warrior class.

THE LOWPOINT: *PERCEVAL* AND *PEREDUR*

Accounts of the hero's upbringing outside of courtly society, and of his noble, knightly lineage, fill the opening sequences of Chrétien's final and unfinished romance, *Perceval*, as well as the Welsh *Peredur*.⁶⁸ Both, like *Cligés*, open away from Arthur's court, with the heroes' decision to seek the *roi qui les chevaliers fait* (king who makes knights, 333). Their induction into the royal entourage, however, lacks the warm welcome of Alexander's westward progress from Constantinople to Britain, and far from the international prestige and superlative glory of Arthur's *Cligés* court, *Perceval* and *Peredur*

enter instead the depleted and spiteful community of a distracted and besieged king.

In Chrétien's romance, Arthur, though flush with his recent defeat of King Rion of the Isles, broods over his empty hall. It seems that, after the battle victory, his champions left him for their own "better" castles: *de ses compaignons iriez/ Qui as chastiax se departirent,/ La ou le meillor sejour virent* ([Arthur] is angry at his companions, who left for their castles, where they find better places to stay, 854–56). Arthur is both angered by the exodus and sad not to know of their condition: *N'il ne set coment il lor va;/ Ce est li doels que li wis a* (He did not know how they were; that is the reason for his sadness, 858–9). Saddened also by what appears to be the Phyrriic nature of his encounter with Rion: the knights who have remained at the king's court seem in fact unable to leave. Keu is wounded—*li seneschax, quifu bleciez* (1001)—as are the untold numbers of *chevaliers bleché* attended to by the queen.⁶⁹ Rather than celebrating victory with his chief knights, Arthur at the outset of *Perceval* presides over a military infirmary.

Yet the depleted hall of wounded knights does not fully explain the pensive (*Li wis pensa et ne dist mot*, the king was pensive and silent 924), preoccupied (*Li wis fortpanse et mot ne sone*, the king was preoccupied and did not say a word 926), silent state in which Perceval finds the king. Costly victory and battle-weariness render the court vulnerable to attack; moments before Perceval's arrival, Arthur's greatest enemy—the man he most fears⁷⁰—boldly disputes the king's seigniorial hold over the realm (*la terre contredite* 947). The Vermillion Knight, much like Meleaganz of *Lancelot*, punctuates the seriousness of his challenge by targeting the queen: in a "hideous and vile affront" (*honte laide et vilaine* 962), he grabs the king's goblet, douses the queen with wine, and defies anyone to reclaim the king's cup and thus defend Arthur's territorial claim to the realm. Like the war with Rion, this hostile intrusion into Arthur's court likewise occurs outside the narrative. We learn of it only after the fact, through Arthur's own recounting, and it explains in part the dejected silence of the king. But we have already heard the much more defiant version of the Vermillion Knight, who makes Perceval his messenger, waylaying him long enough to furnish the details of his challenge:

“... diras al mauvais roi,
Que s'il ne velt tenir de moi
Sa terre, que il le me rende,
Ou il envoit qui la desfende
Vers moi qui di que ele est moie.
Et a ces ensaignes t'en croie,
Que devant lu pris orendroit,
Atot le vin que il bevoit,
Ceste colpe que je chi port.” (889–97)

... tell the cursed king
that if he does not want to hold from me
his land, then he can surrender it to me,

or send someone to defend it
against me, for I say it is mine.
And on this evidence believe it:
that I just took from him,
with the wine that he was drinking,
this cup that I hold here.

In this circuitous way, Chrétien provides a series of snap-shot introductions to Arthur's court, all of which steadily darken initial news of the king's recent victory. Successive images of absent champions, wounded knights, vulnerable court, stolen goblet, accosted queen, and an up-for-grabs realm all crescendo toward a threatening reality, toward the brash defiance of the king's bold and most-feared enemy. Even before our initial entrance into the king's court, the Arthur of *Perceval* has lost the upper hand.

It is precisely such negative images of King Arthur and his court that also conclude Chrétien's romance, for the unfinished *Perceval* breaks off just as Gauvain's messenger has arrived to cheer the king with long-awaited good news. As it stands, the narrative concludes with an abrupt shift that leaves us locked in Arthur's depression. We are cut off from the joy and celebration (*grant joie* and *grant deduit* 9169) that so enliven Gauvain's palace, steered away from the dubbing ceremony with which Gauvain augments his retinue (*compaignie* 9187) by at least 500 new knights (9172–88). From such images of court vitality and expansion, the narrative turns to the angry despondence and general ill-health of Arthur's immediate world. Akin to the opening infirmary-court, here too Arthur's world is in need of recovery, his court peopled by *li contrait et li ardant* (the lame and the sick 9193). These people have little hope of a happy ending, recognizing that Arthur's long wait for good news has effectively stripped him of his senses: *molt tro-veraja mu et sort/ Le roi ... Qu'il est mot plains de doel et d'ire* ([Gauvain's messenger] will find the king deaf and dumb ... so absorbed is he by sadness and anger 9198–9200). They are fearful and dismayed by the state of Arthur's court (*estre en effroil Et esmaïé et esperdu* 9206–7), and though they see Gauvain's messenger arrive, Chrétien's unfinished narrative leaves them suspended in *le doel qu'en fist parmi la sale* (the grief that filled the hall 9229). Likewise the king: in his final action of Chrétien's final romance, King Arthur falls into dejected unconsciousness:

Li rois fu mornes et pensis
Quant il voit sa grant baronnie
Ne de son neveu ne voit mie,
Et chiet pasmez de la destrece. (9220–23)

The king was mournful and pensive
as he looked on his great barony
without seeing his nephew,
and he fell into a faint from the distress.

The courtly society of *Perceval* is sustained in the end not by King Arthur, but by the wealth and prosperity of Gauvain's increased company. In terms of Chrétien's overall depiction of Arthurian kingship, this final tale culminates with the literal fainting away of regalian power.

Before her son leaves in search of knighthood, Peredur's mother raves of Arthur's court as the place *yn y mae goreu y gwyr a haelafu dewraf* (where are the best of men and the most generous and bravest 9:24–5). Details of the hero's entrance into this superlative world vary only slightly between the French and Welsh versions of the tale, and Peredur, like Perceval, encounters an entirely different community of men than that initially introduced by his mother. He arrives at court just behind an unidentified knight who enters Arthur's hall, grabs a goblet out of Queen Gwenhwyfar's hand, and empties the contents in her face before striking her boldly in front of all the “best” and “bravest” men (11:21–30). Such pointed violation of Welsh laws protecting the honor of the queen—as calculated an insult as the Vermillion Knight's challenge in *Perceval* or Meleaganz in *Lancelot*—is a direct attack on the power of the king (Cichon 30–31). The knight then departs with the stolen goblet, challenging anyone to avenge the injury in single-combat. In response to such blatant outrage and physical attack, Arthur himself keeps silent—his first direct speech is still ten pages ahead in Goetinck's edition (22:19, or roughly one third into the tale). The *rhamant* in fact fails to mention the king at all, and we remain unaware of his response to the invasion of his court.⁷¹ Compounding the king's inertia, his court's fearful hesitation adds even further irony to the superlative description offered earlier by Peredur's mother:

Sef a oruc pawb yna, estwg y wyneb rac adolwyn idaw uynet y dial sarhaet
Wenhwyfar, ac yn tebic ganthunt na wnaei neb kyfryw gyflauan a honno, namyn o
vot arnaw milwryaeth ac angerd neu hut a lleith, mal na allei neb ymdiala ac ef.
(12:6–11)

This is what everyone did then: hanging his head lest he be asked to go and avenge the insult to Gwenhwyfar, and it seemed to them that none would commit such an outrage as that unless he had with him might and prowess or magic and enchantment, so that none might wreak vengeance on him.

As in both *Perceval* and *Lancelot*, the easy success of a hostile intruder demonstrates the vulnerability of Arthur's world to attack. As in *Iarllles*, the weakness of the king's rule begets cowardly and unruly misbehavior in his *teulu*. Neither protector nor defender, Arthur exhibits no sovereign power and plays little to no narrative role—a marginalized role evident in some form in all of the opening sequences considered here. As *Peredur* progresses beyond its opening framework, other characters in fact take Arthur's place with increasing frequency. In a marked switch from the standards of royal hospitality upheld in *Cligés*, for instance, Peredur's lame uncle, rather than King Arthur, instructs Peredur and ordains him a knight, *urdaw yn varchawc urdawl* (18:9–18).⁷² Later, though wounded in the thigh, Peredur himself

replaces the king, intercepting Arthur's horse and arms to joust in his place as *y Mackwy Mut*, the Mute Knight (41:16–42:7).⁷³ Lamé uncle and wounded hero out-perform King Arthur in these instances, and *Peredur*, like *Gereint* and *Iarllles*, unflinchingly carries over into native Welsh tradition Chrétien's progressively silenced and replaceable king.

A striking element common to each of the French and Welsh Arthurian romances discussed here is the insignificance of a king who proves to be not only narratively subordinate to knightly adventure and heroic combat but also marginalized by inactivity and silence, made the frequent butt of rhetorical irony that reveals the inadequacies of his “ideal” rule. The implications of Arthur's gradual decline make ambiguous and complex the romance adoption and alteration of Geoffrey's popularized icon of sociopolitical power, and these new Arthurian fictions effectively transfer power from the king to his noble, combative knights. Chrétiens poems and the Welsh tales, providing the earliest vernacular versions of a weak and decentralized King Arthur, thus offer insight into ambiguous perceptions of contemporary kingship with their ideology of an active, interventionist baronial force. Such a waning figure of kingship proves incommensurate with external historical changes in the exercise of regalian authority, exemplified in the latter half of the twelfth century by Angevin expansion and the steadily increasing centralization of the Capetian monarchy. For the comital audiences of Chrétien's continental patrons, Arthurian decline, at least in part, proffers opportunity and the imagined potential, within a relatively weak monarchy, for knightly autonomy. The ideological processes at work in *y rhamantau* likewise promote political, but also cultural, independence from foreign overlordship, their appropriation of Chrétien's weak romance Arthur and his equally cowardly and unruly *teulu* a means of representing the dangerous threat to native government posed by Angevin overlordship.

Chapter Six

Transcultural Change: Minor and Becoming-Minor Literature¹

With the broad distinction formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, emergent vernacular literatures of the European Middle Ages can in general be deemed “minor” in relation to the dominant, clerical authority of “major” Latin textuality. Vernacular fiction inherently *fingit*, making fables and lies out of the theological truths found via “straight” Latin grammar and Biblical exegesis (Bloch, *Etymologies* 52–3, 59). The Arthurian romances considered here belong in this sense to a young and revolutionary minority of vernacular works that, in conjunction with burgeoning state government, begin to loosen the cultural and political stronghold of Latin.² A transcultural fascination with a new, distinct King Arthur and the literary reconfiguration of his regalian power mark both French and Welsh romance as distinct from Geoffrey’s Latin historiography, and the previous chapter aimed to underscore the common portrait of weakened and waning kingship that brings these two vernacular corpora together.

The categories of major and minor are fluid, however, with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as “ambiguous edges” and “changing borders,” such that any one language can function alternately as “an exercise of power” or as a resistance to such an exercise (23–4).³ Siân Echard’s analysis of “new Latin” Angevin court literature, for example, has shown how some aspects of normative Latin textual authority can be viewed as equally subversive and equally minor as the vernacular texts studied by Susan Crane and Gabrielle Spiegel (*ANLT* 1–30). In this final chapter, I adopt Deleuze and Guattari’s minor/major opposition not to explore the power dynamic between Latin and the vernacular, but rather to gain insight into the cultural problematics posed by the transfer of narrative materials between vernaculars, in this case from French to Welsh. From the early thirteenth-century perspective of aristocratic Welsh society, the absorption of French court culture—dress, morals, comportment, as well as textuality—likely proved double-edged. On the one hand such assimilation helped conform “barbaric” Welsh mores⁴ to the fashionable manners and habits of the day, enabling princes such as Owain Cyfeiliog of Powys to win over elite Anglo-Norman circles with sophisticated wit and refined speech.⁵ Outside influences on the other hand were perhaps also associated with the tactics of political domination and colonization—strategic intermarriage, resettlement of Flemish and English colonists, feverish castle-building, treaties, selective alliance, land seizure, kidnapping,

imprisonment, murder, enforced slavery⁶—influences that had been threatening to incorporate Wales into an insular Anglo-French *regnum* since the Norman Conquest. True, unlike “deterritorialized” minorities writing today in English, the medieval Welsh were never entirely displaced territorially or linguistically: *Pura Wallia* remained an independent land ruled by Welsh princes. The Welsh were, however, very much deterritorialized in relation to power, and aspects of *y rhamantau* seem to rebel against what must have been viewed as a normative and hegemonic French vernacular culture inextricably linked to oppressive foreign overlordship.

The ambiguity of terms of national identity in this period merits a brief explanatory note. Describing the twelfth- and thirteenth-century ruling elite of England as “Anglo-Norman,” “Anglo-Angevin,” or “Anglo-French,” scholars and historians recognize the specifically continental origin of the cultural and political changes that occurred across the British Isles in the wake of the Norman Conquest. Such terminology effectively designates the geographical as well as sociopolitical relocation of continental power to an insular, “Anglo” base. Yet by the end of the twelfth century, insular francophone nobility—at least as viewed by contemporaries—had all but shed the continental aspect of its double identity, becoming indistinguishable from the English.⁷ “Settler communities” of insular French-speaking elites had come to identify themselves as “vociferously” and “defiantly” English (Davies, *FEE* 145). The descendants of William the Conqueror still spoke French, but their territorial holdings were now contained almost exclusively to England. They lived “by English law, within a framework of English institutions,” and accepted as their own the history of the English as recorded, for instance, in Geoffrey Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*, c. 1140, the earliest known history written in the French language (Gillingham, “Beginnings” 405; Davies, *FEE* 196). R. R. Davies defines this shift as “Anglicization,” and he describes how, by the turn of the thirteenth century, “the sense of a separate Norman or French identity among the ruling elites of England wilted, to be replaced by a single, undifferentiated English identity” (*FEE* 145).⁸ Davies thus uses the terms “Norman” and “Anglo-Norman” to refer to the period before roughly 1170–1200, the term “English” thereafter (*Domination and Conquest* 112–17), marking the Englishing of insular francophone elite punctuated in 1204 by the loss of Normandy and the beginning of the end of the cross-Channel reach of English kings and barons.⁹ The ideas of “France” and “French” also require brief clarification. Distinct from the historical reality of dynamic continental principalities that provides the focus of [Chapter Three](#), “France” is used here as a general term to identify the cultural and linguistic attributes of a specifically insular noble community; I do not intend it to imply any contemporary sense of a single continental nation or people. “French” here refers to a general cultural influence, and is used to contextualize the thirteenth-century transfer of literary material from one time and place to another.

This complex fusion of the francophone ruling elite with an insular Anglo identity helps contextualize the Welsh appropriation of continental Arthurian romance as the expression of cultural and political difference. While the insular distinction between French and English “wilted” over the latter half of the twelfth century, that between English and Welsh intensified into what Davies has termed a “racial division” between superior and inferior that segregated Wales into a “land of two peoples” (*FEE* 145; *Lordship* 306; *Conquest* 419). By the time of *y rhamantau*, lordships in Wales were divided administratively into “Englishries” and “Welshries,” two separate systems of law operated, two distinct practices (primogeniture and payability) regulated the inheritance of land, and a Welsh romancer recognized the French and the English as forming a single separate linguistic community distinct from the Welsh (Davies, *Conquest* 420, *FEE* 154–5).¹⁰

Welsh poets, romancers, and nobility might well have come to associate French literary material with precisely this kind of imposed hybridity, its circulation perhaps becoming emblematic of francophone political dominance. To be sure, some of the earliest French literature coincides with the hayday of Henry Us territorial expansionism.¹¹ French verse romance in particular, beginning with the *romans antiques* (*Roman de Thèbes*, c. 1150; *Roman d'Enéas*, c.1 155–60; *Roman de Troyes*, c. 1165), seems even to collude with the Anglo-Norman dynasty then ruling Britain. All three of the *romans antiques* recycle tales that legitimize the coming of a foreign dynasty on the one hand and glorify conquest on the other.¹² French romance evolves in part as a genre intimately connected with the spread of an ideology of conquest and cultural superiority, an ideology of cultural dominance evident, for instance, in the distribution of Welsh territory in *Cligès* or in the negative Welsh stereotype of *Perceval*. Chrétien's Arthurian romances, once transmitted across the Channel and removed from their specific date and origin in the continental principalities of Champaign and Flanders, would quite possibly offer attractive targets of countercolonial “Welshification.” By incorporating aspects of French textuality into Welsh literary tradition, *y rhamantau* frustrate any French cultural stranglehold—they make a minor use of the major, fulfilling the “dream” of minor authors to create from the normative “a becoming-minor” literature (Deleuze and Guattari 27). Removed in time by at least a generation from the continental romances of Chrétien de Troyes, *y rhamantau* absorb an otherwise alien literary genre and transform it into something distinctly native: French verse becomes Welsh prose, lengthy narratives abridged into staccato tales marked by native formulas. *Y tair rhamant* in this way make minor, Welshify the romance tradition that the Welsh would have associated with a major French vernacular. The terminology of Deleuze and Guattari draws attention to the oppositional reality of medieval Britain and places *y tair rhamant* squarely within the fraught twelfth- and thirteenth-century relationship between francophone England and Wales.

Unlike Edward Said or Homi Bhabha, Deleuze and Guattari do not explicitly frame the tension between dominant power and dynamic change as the result of colonialism. Yet, in their terms, a “minority” constructs a minor literature, a minority of “uncertain or oppressed” “national consciousness,” a minority that expresses its difference by “blurring” and “reworking” a major literature (16, 17, 24, 25).¹³ The Arthurian *rhamantau* are the inventive and revolutionary alteration of language, content, and form; a “mixture” of French and Welsh traditions, “a schizophrenic melange” in which “different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out” (26). Certainly, *y rhamantau* do not respond specifically to Chrétien de Troyes or to the dynamic political context of his northern French milieu. They respond rather to the normative force of French language and poetry as it functioned in the Welsh context. Minority in this sense delineates a position of cultural and political difference, and it is precisely from such a distinct position in relation to the major that a minority can resist the normative—it is the “glory” of a minor literature to be a “revolutionary force” (19).¹⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari minor status is necessarily political, and designates “the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (17, 18). They metaphorically imagine the power of a thriving, lesser literary tradition to churn and upset the core of the culture that would dominate it, effecting a “revolution in the heart” akin to chronic heartburn—a constant roiling within the body of a major national literature. A similar kind of roiling can distinguish *y rhamantau* from the earlier continental romances of Chrétien de Troyes. More than simply exerting pressure on the form, the language, and the content of continental romance, these tales reconstruct cultural standards of knightly heroism and rewrite contemporary assumptions of Welsh inferiority.

Despite a shared fascination with Arthurian kingship, the Welsh and French corpora are the products of separate cultures, and the Welsh tales confidently reclaim native material that had been filtered through continental tradition. This is not to imply that the Welsh had somehow lost or neglected their native lore before resurrecting it in resistance to new French vernacular production. Rather that the literary artists of medieval Wales were familiar with and responded actively to the political use being made of Arthurian material in the French vernacular. And indeed they did so with remarkable success, turning lengthy verse romances of French “chivalry and learning” into native *chwedlau* that “fit rather nicely into the same category as the Four Branches.”¹⁵ For all of their evident continental influence, *y rhamantau* remain distinctly Welsh in expression, style, and language.¹⁶ Welsh romancers pare the tales down to roughly one-fourth the length of Chrétien’s poems, methodically introducing what Roger Middleton in reference to *Gereint* has termed a “system” of Welsh formula (154–55). Vast and ambiguous geography creates the illusion of a single Wales distinct from *Lloegr* (England), a geography moreover held intact by a unique language that

explicitly differentiates *y Freinc a'r Saesson* (the French and the English) from *y Kymry* (the Welsh) (*Gereint* 1067–68). Anonymous and undedicated, these reconfigured tales accentuate a distinct and collective Welsh identity of shared language, myth, and literary tradition: an imagined sociopolitical community of One Wales. Alongside contemporary court poetry praising rulers of an undivided *Prydein*, and law tracts and bureaucratic vocabulary assuming Wales to be a single legal unit, *y rhamantau* can likewise be seen to assert by common language and shared literary tradition the contemporary political cohesion being forged by the thirteenth-century princes of Gwynedd.¹⁷

A'r chwedyl hwn a elwir Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnwawn (and this tale is called the Tale of the Lady of the Fountain, 822): the title and final line of *Iarlles y Ffynnwawn* divert the narrative focus of its French source from Yvain, *chevalier au lion* (knight of the lion), to the temporarily independent Lady whom the hero marries. This shift accentuates the cultural division between Welsh and English practices of inheritance by granting a Welsh noblewoman the specifically English right to claim her dead husband's land as dowry.¹⁸ Although *iarllesau* (widowed ladies) and *etifeddesau* (destitute heiresses) were common in the English-Welsh March, in *Pura Wallia* women could not inherit land (Owen, “Arbennic” 94). The *iarlles* of *Iarlles* does inherit, however, and though she retains possession of her dead husband's earldom only briefly and with difficulty before she remarries, the Welsh tale swallows foreign inheritance practice whole, incorporating its separateness into native discourse. A. H. Diverres has in fact concluded that “the central theme [of *Iarlles*] is the advocacy of aristocratic women's right to land” (“*Iarlles*” 161).¹⁹ Yet more than a general issue of gender, the translation of Yvain's quest for a fief into a tale of the Lady's Fountain foregrounds the marked cultural difference that distances francophone English practice from that of the Welsh.

This tale concludes, moreover, with the hero retiring to *his* lands (*y gyfoeth e hun*, 819)—not to those of his wife—where he lives out his life in military victories (820–21). The *iarlles* and her Fountain realm are absent from the warrior-hero's happy ending; he leaves Arthur's court for the stability, strength, and kinship protection of his own two-pronged *teulu*, the 300 swords of the Cynferchyn (*trychant cledyf Kenuerchyn*) and his “ravens” (*branhys*): *Ac yr' lle yd elei Owein a hynny gantaw, goruot a wnaei* (and wherever Owein took them [his ravens] with him, he would have victory, 820–21). *Iarlles* thus integrates the otherness of *Yvain* into the very make-up of new Welsh *rhamant*, producing in the end a native *teulu* much more reminiscent of “battle and booze” warriors than is the Arthurian court of the tale's opening lines.²⁰

In many ways this tale is *not* about the *iarlles*, or at least not centrally. *Iarlles* chronicles a revitalization of native Welsh *teulu* from Arthur's opening *rhamant*-court to Owein's concluding warrior retinue. The sparring use of

official court titles coincides with this trajectory. The tale names only two posts, *porthawr* (porter, 5) and *pennteulu* (head of the warband, 818), the first negatively mentioned in the opening lines: *A chyt dywettit uot porthawr ar lys Arthur, nyt oed yr vn* (and although it was said that there was a porter at Arthurs court, there was none, 4–5). The second is the role to which Owein returns, an official post absent from the opening lines that adds significant prestige to Arthurs court: *Ac Owein a trigywysyn llys Arthur o hynny allannyn pennteulu, acyn annwylidaw, yny aeth ary gyfoeth e hun* (and Owein stayed at Arthurs court from then on as *pennteulu*, and he was loved [by Arthur], until he went to his own lands, 817–19). The exchange between tales and languages proves most culturally charged in such translations of sociopolitical power. A strategy of ingestion serves in general to Welshify French Arthurian romance, and details such as the redirected attention on the Lady of the Fountain or the triumphant build toward Oweins native *teulu* provide pivotal points of departure between these two national corpora.

That said, no Welsh counterpart exists to rewrite King Arthur's military and political action in *Cligés*, an intriguing omission that emphasizes the difficulty, even the inherent danger, in interpreting what I'm calling transcultural shifts from a particularly modern bent. *Cligés*, after all, would seem the most obvious target for wholesale Welsh revision, and yet no such *rhamant* exists in and of itself. With regard to issues of the disposability of Welsh territory, however, *Gereint* can be said to perform just such a task. Take as example the following sequence from Chrétien's *Cligés*, in which part and parcel of Arthurs dominion over Britain is his possession and rule of Wales. Much like the Norman and Angevin kings of England (see e.g. Church), Arthur regards both Welsh knights and Welsh territory as a cache from which to dispense royal favor. More than simply granting Welsh territory as reward for exceptional military service, the Arthur of *Cligés* goes so far as to offer to crown Alexander king of the *meillor reaume de Gales*, the best kingdom of Wales:

“Amis,” dist [li rois Arm], “molt vos vi hier
 Bel assaillir et bel desfandre:
 Le guerredon vos an doi randre;
 De .v'. chevaliers galois
 Vostre bataille vos acrois,
 Et de mil sergenz de ma terre.
 Quant j'avrai finee ma guerre,
 Avoec ce que vos ai done,
 Ferai de vos roi coroné
 Del meillor reaume de Gales.
 Bors et chastiax, citez et sales
 Vos i donrai en atandue,
 Tresqu'a tant que vos iert randue
 La terre que tient vostre peres
 Don vos devez estre empereres.” (1434–48)

Friend, said [King Arthur], many times I saw you
 attack and defend well yesterday.
 I must give you a reward for that.
 With five hundred Welsh knights
 and one thousand infantrymen
 I increase your army.
 When my war is over,
 in addition to what I have given you,
 I will make you the crowned king
 of the best kingdom of Wales.
 Fortified towns and castles, citadels and halls,
 I will give you there while you wait
 to receive
 the land held by your father,
 over which you will be emperor.

Chrétien's king here recognizes distinct and multiple Welsh kingdoms only to assert his jurisdiction over them, and this sequence of the romance is clearly interested in establishing Arthur's absolute power. Just prior to the lines above, in which the king augments Alexander's battalion with five hundred Welsh knights (.v'. *chevaliers galois*, 1437) and invests him with Welsh kingship, Arthur tortures and executes captured traitors beneath Windsor castle (1422–28). He imposes his domination and displays a powerful capacity for action and regalian control that proves exceptional in Arthurian romance in general let alone in those of Chrétien de Troyes. King Arthur's dominion over Welsh kingship, and over Welsh “towns, castles, citadels and halls” (*bors et chastiax, citez et sales*, 1444), mirrors this violent control over political bodies, and the king fragments and distributes the kingdoms of Wales just as easily as he quarters and executes felons. The disposability of Wales and the Welsh is only one aspect of this sequence that, as suggested in [Chapter Five](#) above, allows Chrétien to criticize and dramatize the possible dangers of excessive regalian power. The point, then, is not to label the Champenois poet as a would-be conqueror of Wales. It is rather to isolate in this passage an inherited cultural assumption to which *Gereint* later replies, the unquestioned understanding of Wales and the Welsh as the storehouse or reserve supply of foreign kings.

Wales is parceled out and controlled with more subtlety in *Erec et Enide*. Erec is a southern Welsh native of the *rëaume d'Estre Gales* (1826, 3861), the kingdom of Deheubarth—where *li Breton* know him by name (650–52). He is thus a foreigner at Arthur's court, and a relative new-comer: *de la cort le roi Artus sui, / Hen ai esté trios anz a lui* (I am from King Arthur's court; I have been three years with him, 653–4). Chrétien's poem does not harp on the hero's Welshness in the manner of *Perceval*—it's a hardly mentioned detail—but by distinguishing Erec's southwest kingdom from Arthur's principal court of Cardigan in the northwest, *Erec* divides Wales and the Welsh into parts. At least six times (three within sixteen lines: 655, 662, 671), Chrétien insists on the distinction between Erec's own country—[s]a *terre*—and the fortified town of the Sparrow Hawk Custom—*ceste contree, cest païs*—both of which

fall outside of Arthur's domain. Upon Erec's return to Arthur's court at Cardigan, the queen recognizes his new bride as being equally alien, a *bele pucele estrange* (a beautiful foreign maiden, 1707)—so beautiful as to be the undisputed winner of the king's newly reinstated custom (1725–35). The queen in fact gauges the value of a knight to King Arthur's court in terms of his ability to win a woman abroad. As she phrases it to the king,

“... bien doit venir a cort de roi
qui par ses armes puet conquerre
si bele dame en autre terre.” (1722–24)

... he is welcome at the king's court
who can win in combat
so beautiful a woman in another land.

Guenievre seems in this way to encourage intermarriage as a means to extend the power and influence of the king, a tactic strategically familiar to both the francophone elites of England and Welsh princes alike. Arthur likewise increases his retinue with Yder, son of Nut, whose insult to the queen launched Erec's initial adventure in the Sparrow Hawk realm.²¹ Marriage and the cultural absorption of *etranger* into court society here prove to be stabilizing bases of Arthurian order, helping in this sequence to mitigate Arthur's questionable decision to reinstate the unwanted White Stag custom and camouflage court dispute with a veil of inclusive harmony. As shown in the previous chapter, the harmony of Arthur's regalian universe evaporates in the poem's concluding image of the newly crowned King Erec. As the two kings sit side by side in matching thrones, representing a kingdom ruled from Cardigan and another from *Estre Gales*, this concluding image subtly accentuates a north-south division of Wales.

Differences in textual detail redirect *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* away from *Erec et Enide*. Absent is Chrétien's description of proper kingship, for one, put into the mouth of a rash Arthur intent on reinstating an unwelcome custom (*Erec* 1749–76). In *Gereint*, the idea of the White Stag custom causes no contention at court: rather than an unpopular revival of Uther Pendragons past rule (*Erec* 1767–70), it is a new contest requested by Gwalchmei and granted by Arthur:

“Arglwyd,” heb [Gwalchmei], “ponyd oed iawn i titheu canhadu y'r neb a delei hwnnw attaw yn y helua Had y benn a'y rodi y r neb y mynhei, ay y orderch kaw e hun, ae y orderch y gydymdeith itaw, na marchawc na phedestyr y del itaw?”
“Canhadaf yn llawen,” heb yr Arthur. (54–58)

Lord, asked Gwalchmei, will you not allow the man (to whom [the stag] comes during the hunt)—whether he is a mounted knight or a foot soldier—to cut off its head and present it to whomever he wish, either to his own lady or to his comrades?
I will allow it.gladly, said Arthur.

When fighting does erupt over the stag's head, it is unforeseen and

immediately calmed by the joint intervention of both king and queen. The general tenor of Arthur's court thus differs markedly in *Gereint*. Though shown in the previous chapter to participate in a general, generic undercutting of Arthurian kingship, the social world of the king's court is not as menaced from within here, the rift between king and his knights not as great as in the initial scene of *Erec*. There is instead a sense of a whole and distinct community that carries over into *Gereint*'s geography. The Welsh tale erases the north-south divide that, in the French poem, separates Arthur's realm from Erec's. Foreignness is important in *Gereint*, but to a different end. Far from creating difference between king and hero-knight, foreignness here distinguishes the French and the English (*y Ffeinc a'r Saesson*, 1067–8) from the Welsh (*y Kymry*, 1068), a hostile England (*Lloygyr*, 739, 742) from Gereint's realm (*kyfoeth*, 737), and Arthur's knight from the foreign-armed Edern (*yr arueu ystronawl* 125–6). The borderland of England is in fact hostile territory for Gereint, and his father warns him against traveling there *yn unig* (alone 739–40), for, as he says, “*llawer dyn a’y hawl arnat yn Lloygyr*” (many men have a claim against you in England, 741–2). The fairly subtle Welsh setting of *Erec* becomes in *Gereint* a more explicit awareness of insular ethnic differences. In a way that the French poem does not, the *rhamant*'s more careful distinction of borders serves to emphasize the protection of both Welsh territory and Welsh justice.

It is not just the visible otherness of his unknown opponent that marks Gereint's first adventure in the company of the queen. The hostility of the encounter stems more so from the social arrogance of the knight (later identified as Edern uab Nut) and his dwarf—arrogance very much predicated on visible difference. As in the French romance, at issue is a snub, the brutal and insulting refusal to answer the queen's request for identification. The *rhamant* augments two details of Chrétien's scene, writing in the explicitly foreign trappings of the unknown knight and intensifying the degree of violence meted out to both the queen's maiden and Gereint. The *rhamant* thus revises the scene as a violent ethnic encounter between Arthur's realm and what lies beyond it.

Edern's helmet identifies him at once as *ystronawl*, foreign: “*Gereint*,” *heby Gwenhwyuar*, “*a atwaynost ti y marchawc racco mawr?*” “*Nac atwen*,” *heb ynteu*; “*ny atyr arueu ystronawl mawr racco welet na’y vyneb efna’y bryt*” (Gereint, asked the queen, do you recognize that big knight over there? I do not, he said; the big foreign armor over there does not allow either his face or his expression to be seen, 124–126). In contrast, Gereint is *eskeirnoyth* (bare-legged, 93), and as R. R. Davies has put it, this distinct “*lack of clothes—especially of stockings and footwear—ma[kes him] immediately recognizable*” as Welsh (“*Buchedd*” 175).²² The helmet here identifies Edern as foreign, or at least as equipped in the armor of a non-Welsh knight.²³ This ethnic distinction between concealed face and bare legs provides the only textual basis for the double insult of Edern's dwarf. Citing Gereint's social

inferiority, the dwarf whips him across the face and eyes after prohibiting him from addressing Edern: “*Na ouynhy, myn uygkred, “heby corr, “nyd vty un anrydet di ac y dylyhych ymdidan a'm argltyvd i*” (You will not [speak to the knight], by my faith, said the dwarf, you are not of a high enough rank to entitle you to speak to my lord, 144–46). Gereint responds to the physical and verbal blows by alluding to his own privileged tie to King Arthur: “*Miui, “heby Gereint, “a ymdideneis a gwr yssed gystal a'th arglivi yd di*” (I have, said Gereint, spoken with a man as good as your lord 146–47). But the dwarf remains steadfast in shielding Edern from the likes of such a bare-legged Welshman, blocking Gereint's path and whipping him *yny oedy gwaet yn lliwaw y llenn a oed am Ereint* (until the blood stained the mantle that Gereint wore, 150). Unlike the similar scene in Chrétien's *Erec*, a brutally imposed sense of foreign superiority heightens in the Welsh tale a dynamic of hostile and threatened borders. The scene advises both wary defensiveness and retribution against aggressive boldness from beyond, and the hero's initial quest seeks redress for ethnic and cultural slight.

Borders develop into a prominent theme in the *rhamant*, and will add to the Sparrow Hawk sequence an anxiety about keeping territory intact that simply does not figure in Chrétien's romance. The Sparrow Hawk town seems to be a native place under heavy foreign influence. We do not yet seem to be beyond the borders of Wales, where the tale will later take Gereint and his wife. *That* is a threatening place—not only will Gereint's father warn him explicitly about the dangers of crossing into England,²⁴ but the couples adventures will emphatically confirm the lawless free-for-all that seems to hold sway just outside of Wales. For the moment, Gereint stays in Wales, and his quest to avenge the dwarf's insult takes him below Kaerlleon, across the Usk to a *dinastref* (166) with a *caer* and a *castell* (167) later identified as the *iarllaith* (earldom) of *Cayrdyf* (Cardiff, 457). This English loan-word *iarll* (earl) merits an aside. Though common enough in *y rhamantau*, it appears only once in the roughly 12,600 lines of contemporaneous *gogynfeirdd* poetry (the praise poetry of the Welsh princes). Such a disparity—the predominance of the terms use in *rhamant* as opposed to its virtual absence from praise poetry—has led Morfydd Owen to suggest that *y rhamantau* reflect a degree of Anglo-French control over the Welsh courts that produced them (“Cymdeithas” 93–4). If so, this idea of cultural control must be seen as two-sided, as operating as much from *Gereint's* potentially subversive account of the Cardiff earldom. This town is clearly “Anglicized,” and yet the hero will help to reinstate both an old native order and the Welsh practice of payability.

Well illustrated in the Sparrow Hawk sequence of *Gereint* is the threatening tension between old ways and new, native and foreign. Gereint has clearly traveled south of Arthur's jurisdiction: whereas throngs of townspeople greet the knight in “foreign armor” and escort him to the castle, Gereint is both unrecognized and unfamiliar with his surroundings (167–79). He finds lodging outside the town in an old, dilapidated court (*hen lllys atueiledic*, 182–

3) with an old man (*gurr gwynllwytgohen*, 459) and an old woman (*go-henwreic*, *gyreic oedawc*, 197, 459–60) wearing old silk (*hen dillat atueiledic o bali*, 198, 188, 460). It is not their poverty that is stressed here, as is the case in *Erec*, but their state of disrepair, both their clothes and their court repeatedly described as *atueiledic*—dilapidated and ruined (183, 188, 198, 201, 458, 460). Rather than focusing primarily on the old man's beautiful and available daughter, the Welsh tale instead traces the fall of an old order. The old man in fact possesses (*bioed*, 226, 228) the old court, had it built, and once also possessed both the *dinas* and the *castell*. But he lost it all, along with a *iarllaeth uawr* (a great earldom, 230), by withholding his nephews domain. Once strong enough, the nephew waged war and won everything, his own domain as well as that of his uncle (225–35). Thus both uncle and nephew fought to thwart the Welsh practice of partition, both generations seeking to maintain the integrity of a large territorial holding. The tale at this point neither comments nor offers judgment, and Gereint reacts to his hosts story by abruptly changing the subject (235–38). Later, however, after defeating Edern uab Nud and avenging Queen Gwenhwyfar, Gereint announces that his primary (*pennaf*) intention once returning to Arthurs court is not to marry the old earls daughter but to reinvest him with his portion of the earldom of Cardiff:

“Y lys Arthur yd af i a'r uorwyn hon yuory. A digawn yw genhyf hyd y may Ynywl iarll ar dlodi a gouut, ac y geissyaw ygchvanegu gossymdeith idaw ef yd af i yn bennaf.” (373–76)

To Arthur's court I will go with this maiden tomorrow. And I think that Earl Ynywl has been in poverty and misery long enough; and it is primarily to seek to increase his fortune that I go.

The implication, as Thomson has suggested in his edition of the tale (86n375), is that justice will be had at Arthur's court, or, by extension, through Arthur's representative, and Gereint demands both that Ynywl's domain be returned and that Ynywl receive the homage of the men who should serve him. Gereint does not dispute the young earl's seizure of his patrimony, but he does enforce partition, the equal dispersal of territory originally resisted by both uncle and nephew. Gereint thus rules against any kind of territorial expansion that infringes payability, echoing twelfth-century poets such as Cynddelw and Elidir Sais who warned their Welsh princes against “raiding beyond boundaries” (quoted by Davies, *Conquest* 118). In this sense the Sparrow Hawk game in *Gereint* is inseparable from the two-fold cause of reinvesting the old earl and upholding native laws of partition. The wrongful cultural arrogance of Edern uab Nud becomes emblematic not only of the young earls injustice against his uncle, but of what is portrayed here as a specifically alien (*ystronawl*) practice of primogeniture.²⁵ Both literally and figuratively Gereint redresses the old mans ruined and dilapidated domain, and his victory reinvigorates a threatened old order. *Y rhamant* thus reconfigures the initial

episodes of Chrétien's *Erec* into a distinctly Welsh tale that deflects violent cultural affronts of Anglo-French influence—both Edern's bold arrogance as well as the young earls' hold over the Cardiff earldom.

The “becoming-minor” of *Yvain*, *Cligés*, and *Erec*—their transformation into native Welsh *rhamantau*—entails the persistent repetition of cultural difference. I have touched briefly on some points of departure that insist on Welsh cultural identity as well as on the geographical unity and integrity of Wales and its borders. Even in the notable absence of a separate Welsh counterpart to *Cligés*, *Gereint* in particular rewrites the image of a disposable and fragmented Wales, calling into question any general assumption of “Anglicized” jurisdiction over Wales and Welsh knights. *Peredur*, however, responds to the altogether more strident and negatively stereotyped sense of Welsh difference. The stereotype fuels the humor of the early sequences of *Perceval*, Chrétien's final and incomplete romance—a maturation tale of the rude, ignorant, and socially inept *Gabis* (Welshman) destined slowly to assimilate to French Arthurian civilization yet never finally allowed to succeed. Several scholars have noted in passing the cultural bias of *Perceval*.²⁶ In the context of twelfth- and thirteenth-century insular antagonisms between a francophone elite in England and native Welsh rulers in *Pura Wallia*, Chrétien's poem provides particularly fruitful material for oppositional interpretations such as those offered by the theories of Deleuze and Guattari or Bhabha. Stephen Knight has recently published the first postcolonial analysis of *Peredur*, “Resemblance and Menace,” an analysis indebted to Bhabha and to which we will soon return.²⁷ Thus far neglected, however, remains the extent of cultural transfer between these two texts, the way in which Chrétien inherited anti-Welsh bias morphs into *Peredur*. Dramatizing the initial, resolute failure of the Welsh boys' initiation into Arthur's court as well as the ultimate failure of his knightly quest, *Perceval* offers a medieval version of what Bhabha has coined “mimicry,” in his opinion “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge”—that is, the creation of a recognizable cultural Other that is always “almost the same, but not quite” (85, 86).²⁸ The distinct ethnic identity of *Perceval*, in other words, always already bars him from success in Arthurian society. This is not to brand Chrétien de Troyes as an active, “Kiplingesque” participant in insular colonialism or cultural imperialism.²⁹ He was not immune, however, to the standard stereotypes of his day, and aspects in his work reveal a confident sense of superiority that alternately targets, among others, the Welsh, Jews, and women. *Peredur* offers striking evidence of a direct response, not to Chrétien himself but to the powerful force of cultural elitism embedded in his final romance, as well as to what can, from a slightly removed Welsh perspective, be considered representative of a nascent ideology of francophone colonialism.

In regard to no other principal character does Chrétien pay such close attention to ethnic markers. *A la guise de Gales* (500–01), and *a la meniere et*

a la guise de Gales (602–03), Perceval wears a coarse top (*de canevas grosse chemise*, 499) and leather footwear, what the narrator describes as Welsh pants:

... braies faites a la guise
De Gales, ou on fait ensamble
Braies et cauces, ce me samble. (500–02)

... pants made in the style
of Wales, where they make as one
pants and boots, it seems to me.

Welsh-style pants, in other words, are footwear-leggings all in one. Later references to Perceval's *vesteüre* in fact omit further mention of *braies*, describing his ensemble as consisting of a *grosse chemise* and *revelins* (leather boots).³⁰ Perceval, like the hero Gereint, seems here to be similarly bare-legged (*eskeirnoyth*, 93). His clothing and weapons make him so distinctly Welsh that his mother takes two of his three javelins from him *por che que trop samblast Galois* (because he appeared too Welsh, 609)—and she would gladly have taken all three of them: *Si eüst ele fait toz trios/ Molt volentiers, s'il peüst ester* (610–11). Later in the romance, Gornemant provides new clothes—shirt and breeches of finer material, and brightly-colored hose (1600–04)—urging Perceval's transformation from recognizable Welshman into Arthurian knight (1605–1623).³¹ Even more so than Perceval's clothing and his javelins, his barbaric manners identify him as Welsh. From the outset of the poem he has no concept of social value, and Chretien's unrelenting use of pejoratives harps on this lack; up to and through the Gornemant episode, he is described with such adjectives as *petit senez*, *nice*, *sot*, *fol*, and *sauvage* (Haidu, *Aesthetic* 124, 124n32). *Li valiéz*, the boy, cares nothing for others. He remains unmoved and uninterested by information and events. He ignores his mother when she finally discloses his violent family history, and brushes her painful memories aside with a demand for his supper:

Li valiéz entent molt petit
A che que sa mere li dist.
“A mengier, fait it, me donez;
Ne sai de coi m'araisonnez...” (489–92)

The boy heard very little
Of what his mother said to him.
“Give me something to eat!” he demanded.
“I don't know what you're talking about...”

Later twisting his mothers advice into acts of abuse and theft, Perceval forces his body and his kisses on a struggling, protesting maiden. He then steals the ring she refuses to give, remaining resolutely indifferent to her tearful complaint: *Li vallés a son euer ne met/ Rien nule de che que il ot* (the boy was not at all concerned by what he heard, 734–5). As to a peasant's account of

Arthur's war, Perceval *ne prise un denier* (he cared not a penny, 879). When the Red Knight recruits the boy as messenger to demand Arthur's homage and proclaim his right to the royal domain, Perceval's stubborn inattention draws comment from the narrator: *Or quiere autre qui li recort,/ Que cil n'i a mot entandu* (now [the Red Knight] should have found another messenger, because this boy didn't understand a word, 898–99). He remains as unmoved by Arthur's own account of his misfortune and the queen's anger; once again, Perceval could not care less:

Li vallés ne prise une chive
Quanques li rois li dist et conte
Ne de son dol ne de sa honte
De sa feme ne li chaut il. (968–71)

[Perceval] didn't give a chive
About anything the king told and recounted to him—
Neither his sadness nor
His wife's shame concerned him.

Perceval seems willfully not to know, hear, or care, and these negative and unlikable aspects of his character seem bonded in the poem to his inherent Welsh inferiority. As one of Arthur's knights says to another:

“Sire, sachiez tot entresait
Que Galois sont tot par nature
Plus fol que bestes en pasture.
Cist est ausi come une beste.” (242–45)

Lord, know without doubt
That the Welsh are all by nature
More senseless than beasts at pasture.
This one [Perceval] is as stupid as a beast.

More than simply a “delightfully uncouth wild man” (Haidu, *Aesthetic* 120), the ethnic construct of Perceval's Welshness resembles what Cohen has called the “manifestation of an othering impulse” (“Hybrids” 88). Such elaboration of cultural difference in many ways guarantees the impossibility and ultimate failure of the hero's quest.

The humor of these early scenes clearly depends upon just such an exaggerated and excessive inferiority. Laughs result from the incongruity of a boorish, rustic native mimicking the vocabulary and adorning himself in the makeshift trappings of proper French knights. Staging such a meeting between barbarian and society, Chrétien conforms to colonialist ideology in general as well as to an accepted norm of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Latin and vernacular narrative that inferior Welsh natives required the benefit of civilizing French culture. As early as 1125, a rhetoric of the Welsh as barbarians colors William of Malmesbury's *De gestis regum Anglorum* (Gillingham, “Context” 106–111; “Beginnings” 396–400), a view more fully

developed in the slightly later accounts of Welsh savagery recorded in the *Gesta Stephani*: “Wales,” remarks the anonymous author in the 1140s, “breeds men of an animal type,” tamed and civilized only by the vigorous perseverance of the Norman conquerors (14–15, 172–3).³² In the 1150s, John of Salisbury similarly writes of the Welsh as *gens rudis et indomita*, rude and untamed people, repeating the by then standard stereotype inherited by Chrétien that *bestiali more uiuens*, they live like beasts (135).³³ Considered in light of such a legacy of anti-Welsh rhetoric, the Welshness of Perceval prejudices him, and essentially sets him up as the only one of Chrétien's heroes ethnically destined to fail.³⁴

To Siân Echard, writing of both *Peredur* and *Perceval* in her article “Of Parody and *Perceval*”, the Welsh adaptation of the French romance to native Welsh taste involves increased parody; to her *Peredur* “pokes fun” at the “pretensions of courtly society” (73).³⁵ Comparing the opening sequence of both tales—the boys arrival at King Arthur's court and his immediate defeat of the insulting knight—Echard finds the two tales to be “essentially the same” “in terms of both sense of humor and moral content.” She explains: “the Welsh boor does what the fine knights cannot, or will not, do. But this implication is as much Welsh as it is French” (“Of Parody” 68, 69). Here I would suggest that Echard misses the essential difference upon which the French statement of nobility and character is based, that of ethnic distinction and, particularly, of Welsh backwardness. It is that incongruity between French Arthurian court and Welsh rustic boy that fuels the humor of *Perceval*.

Such is decidedly not the case in *Peredur*. There is certainly parodic mockery here, but not at the expense of the Welsh boy.³⁶ In contrast to the French tale, from the opening lines we know *Peredur* is of noble lineage, that he was intentionally divested of his patrimony, removed from his northern earldom, and raised by his mother in deserted wasteland to protect him from a clash between “Gallic” and “Cymric” *twrneimeint ac ymladeu a ryueloed* (tournaments and battles and wars, 7:3–4)—from a violent confluence of Anglo-French and Welsh cultures (Knight, “Resemblance” 133). Her wise (*kymen, ystrywys*, 7:10) attempts to shield *Peredur* from the world of *meirch ac arueu* (horses and arms, 7:17) may fall short, but they nonetheless launch the tale into a series of parodic displacements of both the general details and the overall narrative pattern of its French source. Rather than a tale of stereotyped ethnic distinction and failed assimilation, *Peredur* is a story of regained patrimony and reacquired status, one that moreover concludes as a tale of successful family vengeance.

I agree with Echard that “increased parody” distinguishes *Peredur* from *Perceval* *Peredur*'s mother has sheltered and protected her son from his rightful status as knight and earl of a northern earldom. Yet she is the one who first directs him to the “civilization” and “nobility” of Arthur's court, *yn y mae goreu y gwyr a haelaf a dewraf* (where are the best of men, the most generous and bravest, 9:24–5). Her parting advice, as she sends him off to become one

of Arthur's knights, is meant to make him *gwell gwr a ffenedigach* than he was before (a better and nobler man, 10:2–3). Her formula for noble behavior comically jumbles the maternal advice offered in *Perceval* together with the inappropriate filial behavior it elicits, and her instructions to Peredur certainly offer a caustic translation of French knightly nobility. It is in fact difficult to read the following passage from the *rhamant* without admiring how it redirects onto Arthurian “nobility” several details of Perceval's socially disastrous and all but criminal encounter with the Tent Maiden:

“Dos ragot,” heb hi, “y lys Arthur, yn y mae goreu y gwyr a haelaf a dewraf. Yn y gwelych eglwys, can dy pater wrthi. O gwely vwyt a diawt, o byd reit it wrthaw ac na bo o wybot a dayoni y rodi it, kymer tu hun ef. O chlywy diaspat dos wrthi, a diaspat gwreic anat diaspat o'r byt. O gwely tlws tec, kymer ti euo a dyro titheu y arall, ac o hynny clot a geffy. O gwely gwreic tec, gordercha hi kyn ny'th vynho. Gwell gwr a ffenedigach y'th wna no chynt.” (9:24–10:3)

Go, she said, to Arthur's court, where are the best of men, the most generous and bravest. When you see a church, sing your Lord's Prayer to it. If you see food and drink, if you have need of it and it is not offered to you out of manners and goodness, take it yourself. If you hear a scream, go to it, and a woman's scream before any other. If you see a fair jewel, take it and give it to another, and from that you shall earn fame. If you see a fair woman, love her though she desires you not. A better man and more noble will you be than before.

That Peredur's mother exhorts him to regular prayer in no way detracts from the force of this exemplary moment of intertextual parody. Other than echoing Chrétien's romance in this single kernel of maternal guidance, she diverges wildly from Perceval's mother to advise theft, adultery, and the physical abuse if not rape of women. She directs her son to pray but also to take food and jewels, to respond to a woman's outcry but also to love (*gorderchu*) a womanwife (*gwreig*) *kyn ny'th vynho*, whether she wants him or not.³⁷ Peredur's mother rattles off a recipe for courtly nobility that very neatly describes the rude and rustic behavior of Perceval, and *y rhamant* wryly redirects the negative ethnic stereotype of the French poem onto the world of Arthur's court. Wise maternal advice in *Peredur* thus reveals the “double vision” of Bhabha's notion of mimicry, and here an intentionally wayward revision of Chrétien's *Perceval* tends powerfully toward mockery.³⁸

As Peredur sets off to acquire such nobility for himself, comically inadequate cultural assimilation gains imagistic force in his best imitation of Arthurian knights:

A cheffyl brychwelw yscyrnic kryfaf a tebygei a gymerth. A fynorec a wascws yn gyfrwy arnaw. Ac o wydyn y daroed idaw danwaret y kyweirdebeu a welsei o bob peth. (9:14–18)

And [Peredur] took a motley, bony nag—the strongest, so he thought—and pressed a basket on it as a saddle. And with withes he finished imitating all of the trappings he had seen.

Knight has interpreted this description as a “debilitation of Celtic heroism,” a scene in which a “pure Cymro” seeks to abandon his space of “innocent Celticity” and join the ranks of “Anglo-Norman colonial oppressors” (also described as “Gallo-Celtic knights”) (“Resemblance” 134). To be sure, the litany of maternal advice as well as the hero's inappropriate equipment helps turn the opening sequence of *Peredur* into an “ironic pastiche” of cultural hybridity (“Resemblance” 137).³⁹ Yet the powerful humor of the text—not only the boy's incongruous imitation of Arthur's knights, but particularly the exaggerated *ignobility* of their civilized standard of knightly behavior—alters and destabilizes “the structures of mimicry” that Knight describes as “central to the imperializing situation” (“Resemblance” 134). Absolutely erased from the *rhamant* vision of knighthood, for instance, are the dazzling colors and “angelic” beauty that so stun and delight Perceval (125–38). Equally absent is any material demonstration of the knightly terror that causes both mothers to faint. Peredur's improvised wicker equipment inspires none of the anxiety associated in the French romance with armed and dangerous knights *dont la gent se plaignent*,/ *Qui ocident quanqu'il ataignent* (about whom people complain, who kill all they come across, 399–400). Rather than a “cultural apology” for the “Normanization” of Wales (Knight, “Resemblance” 141), the intentionally displaced imitation of the early sequences of *Peredur* confidently and wittily derides any hegemonic influence of its French source.

Peredur's standard of knightly nobility is ironically borne out by the greatness of Arthur's court, where the “best, bravest, and most generous” men prove cowardly at best. Following the hostile intrusion of Arthur's hall, for instance, not a single knight rises to avenge the physical assault on the queen; each instead averts his gaze to avoid combat with a presumably unbeatable foe:

Sef a oruc pawb yna, estwg y wyneb rac adolwyn idaw uynet y dial sarhaet
Wenhwyfar, ac yn tebic ganthunt na wnaei neb kyfryw gyflauan a honno, namyn o
vot arnaw milwryaeth ac angerd neu hut a lletrith, mal na allei neb ymdiala ac ef.
(12:6–11)

This is what everyone did then: they lowered their faces to avoid being asked to go avenge Gwenhwyfar's injury, and they thought it likely that none would commit such an outrage as that unless he had with him prowess and strength or magic and enchantment, so that none could wreak vengeance on him.

The mood of such awkward inactivity is brightened only by the ridiculous sight of Peredur, who arrives on his improper (*aghyweir*, 12:14), broken workhorse, with improper (*aghyweir*, 12:21), makeshift saddle, carrying a handful of darts.⁴⁰

Ac ar hynny y arganuot o'r teulu a dechreu y dyfalu a bwrw llyscon idaw, ac yn da
ganthunt dyuot y kyfryw hwnnw y vynet y chwedyl arall dros gof. (12:23–6)

And at that the retinue noticed him and began to make fun of him and throw sticks

Arthur's *teulu* derides this *dyn fol* (crazy man, 14:27), and Owein worries aloud that, if ever mistaken for one of them, Peredur would dishonor their great reputation and bring *glot tragwydawl y Arthur a'e vilwyr* (eternal disgrace to Arthur and his warriors, 14:30–15:1). Very much as in *Perceval*, it is Peredur's *cerdet*, his manner, and his odd appearance—the maiden describes him as *dyn enryfed y ansawd*, 11:12—that initially single him out for laughter and derision. But unlike *Perceval*, Peredur possesses a wit that defies his sheltered innocence and helps belie his seeming ignorance, and it is ultimately Peredur and his recognizable difference that get the last laugh: he alone avenges the assault on the queen and defeats the “enchanted” knight so feared by Arthur's peerless retinue. What is more, he does so not by dint of a “proper” knight's horse and arms but “in a fully native tradition” with a dart through the eye and a biting retort (Knight, “Resemblance” 134). After receiving a painful blow (*dyrnawt mawr dolurus* 14:20), Peredur dryly dismisses this first opponent before piercing him through the eye: “*A was, ny wharyei weissou vy rnam a mifi velly*” (Friend, not even my mother's servants would fight so playfully with me, 14:21–22).⁴¹ Peredur's wit, as much as his inappropriate horse and arms and his innate proficiency with a native weapon, mark his difference from the royal court.

While Arthur's brave, noble knights throw sticks at Peredur and mock his appearance, two fellow outsiders recognize the boy's superior strength and nobility. By allying the hero with yet one more “other” common to French romance, dwarves,⁴² *y rhamant* further distinguishes itself and its hero from romance tradition. A dwarf couple that has remained resolutely silent for the entire year of their service in Arthur's household hails Peredur by name as *arbenhic milwyr a blodeu marchogyon* (chief warrior and flower of knights, 13:4–5) and welcomes him to court as *blodeu y milwyr a chanhwyll y marchogyon* (flower of warriors and candle of knights, 13:15–16). A playfully ironic opposition between the separate Arthurian civilizations of romance and *rhamant*, between court nobility and native nobility, directs the opening sequences of *Peredur*. Like *Iarllles* and *Gereint*, *Peredur* artfully blends aspects of normative French romance into the distinctly Welsh genre of *rhamant*.

Perhaps the most striking examples of the *rhamant* departure from romance remain the independence of *Peredur*'s narrative sequences and the irregularity of its ending.⁴³ *Peredur* indeed stands alone among Chrétien's romances and *y tair rhamant* in diverting final focus away from the hero to conclude with a powerful portrait of King Arthur. In a generally coherent group of tales that together marginalize kingship to foreground instead the adventures and eventual independence of heroic knights, Peredur wins final victory and exacts vengeance only with the help of Arthur's battle fury Far from the sad, neglected, and unconscious Arthur that closes *Perceval*, the

Arthur of *Peredur* reenters the narrative action in a frenzy, slaying the witches of Kaer Loyvv (*y llas gwidonot Kaer Loyw oll*, 70:24). What more forceful return to a native Welsh witch-slaying Arthur? In a striking divergence from the royal fainting spell with which *Perceval* trails off, *y rhamant* emphatically replays the final witch-hunt of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, reclaiming an Arthur that never convincingly existed in the French tradition created by Chrétien de Troyes. The similarity suggests a purposeful echo: *uyryei y wrach a Charnwennan y gyllell, a'e tharaw am y hanner yny uu yn deu gelwrn hi* ([Arthur] aimed at the witch with Carnwennan his knife, and struck her in half so that she was two tubs [of blood], *Culhwch* 1226–7). This final battle prowess flaunts an Arthur of earlier insular tradition, and *Peredur* thus ends with an assertive exclamation of its distinct cultural difference from continental romance. *Y tair rhamant* are undoubtedly hybrid tales, doubly influenced by both French romance and insular Welsh literature. And yet they do not simply assimilate (“Normanize” or “English”) native heroes of the Old North to a continental norm. Making effective use of Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural mimicry, Stephen Knight well recognizes that colonial strategies “cut both ways,” that they invite imitation “that is at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha 86). And yet the point of analysis to which Knight most frequently returns lessens the *rhamant* menace of mockery, viewing *Peredur* as an assimilative tale that (apologetically) refashions a Celtic hero as “Gallic” (138, 140, 142, 146). More work remains to explore and expand upon the cultural menace of *y tair rhamant*; it is not only through parody that *Peredur*, *Iarllles*, and *Gereint* convert romance into a new Welsh genre. Clear, however, is their overall effect of exploding the normative major into minor literature.

Conclusion

In the last decade several scholars in Medieval French Studies have persuasively and variously demonstrated intimate links between vernacular literary production and the construction of political and cultural ideologies.¹ Channeled from twelfth-century Champagne and Flanders to thirteenth-century native Wales, French Arthurian romance and Welsh *rhamant* provide rich material for just such methods of contextualizing literature. With this aim in mind, [Parts I](#) and [II](#) of this study build the literary and historical framework on which to base an analysis of the new King Arthur of medieval romance.

[Chapters One](#) and [Two](#) consider the national writing of insular literary tradition, pausing at length on the *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth as the historiographical model to which Chretiens Arthurian romances in part respond. Devoted to material that pre-dates romance, these early chapters are integral to viewing romance and *rhamant* as part of a collaborative and mutually complicit assault on the King Arthur of Geoffrey and Wace. [Chapters Three](#) and [Four](#) turn from literary tradition to twelfth- and thirteenth-century political change, focusing notably on the contemporary ascendancy of re-galian power—that of the Plantagenets on both sides of the Channel, that of Philip Augustus' later Capetian France, and that of the Welsh principality of Gwynedd. These two chapters highlight the similar relationship to political power that was shared by the aristocracies of northern France and Wales while also drawing attention to the cultural antagonisms and separate sociopolitical realities that distinguish two very different national identities. [Chapters One](#) through [Four](#) thus lay the groundwork for the reconsideration of continental romance and insular *rhamant* that forms [Part III](#) of this book, identifying both literary and historical trends that profoundly influenced both the corpus of Chretien de Troyes and *y tair rhamant*.

[Part III](#) is indebted to the work of Donald Maddox and Peter Haidu, especially to their approaches to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes that so effectively blend political and historical analyses with interpretation of textual structure and narrative pattern. Exploring the relation of political power to literary form, and specifically tracing the development of two national corpora in the historical contexts of Angevin expansion and Capetian centralization, I have sought to extend such strategies of analysis into the field of Medieval Welsh Studies. [Chapter Five](#) focuses almost exclusively on the opening sequences that introduce King Arthur's regalian power as a narrative framework, and it offers the first inclusive treatment of these eight romances as a coherent group that responds in kind to contemporary political change and increasingly assertive kingship. Two separate national romance corpora

commingle here, and are explored as a single and revolutionary Franco-Welsh collection that reconfigures the King Arthur of Geoffrey's Latin historiography to introduce a weak and declining king into vernacular literary tradition. Charting the progressive decline of Arthurian kingship from the false high-point of *Erec et Enide*, *Gereint*, and *Cligés* to the lowpoint of *Perceval and Peredur*, these two romance corpora construct similarly positive fictions of aristocratic ascendancy and heroic, knightly independence. The contribution of [Chapter Five](#) is precisely this combination and equal treatment of two diverse corpora. The question of origins, still thorny with regard to these tales, is set aside to underscore instead the shared portrait of declining Arthurian power that coheres rather than distances French and Welsh romance as well as the aristocracies for which they were composed.

The alliance formed in these works by a shared fascination with waning Arthurian kingship has long gone unnoted, perhaps because difference rather than similarity has preoccupied critical attention. To be sure, the later *rhamantau* are the products of another culture, separated from their French sources not only by geography and chronology but by the antagonisms brought about by conquest and colonization. [Chapter Six](#) thus turns away from a shared Arthurian framework to consider more broadly the cultural transfer of French romance into Welsh literature. Adopting an expressly insular perspective, this chapter follows Stephen Knight's lead to make use of the largely untapped interpretive resources of postcolonial studies to underscore the more contentious divide that distinguishes romance from *rhamant*. Several contemporary political theorists have shown modern literature and cultural production in general to be inherently political and inevitably scarred by oppressive state systems. The revolutionary "minor literature" defined by Deleuze and Guattari, Edward Said's *Cultural Imperialism*, the global "worlding" of Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* and his "new world" of minority fiction, the "decolonization" of Simon Gikandi's "reverse gaze" of colonialism, the "minority discourses" of Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd all resonate with equal meaning in the medieval contexts of both continental and insular literatures produced in the wake of the Norman Conquest. [Chapter Six](#) provides a political analysis of *y tair rhamantz*'s powerful and confident re-workings of Chrétien's continental poems. As such, it expands upon Knight's recent attention to *Peredur* to encompass all three *rhamantau*. Absolutely indebted to Knight's work, the final analysis here posits much more "menace;" the linguistic, formal, and structural distinction of *y rhamantau* alters and blurs the original source material in ways that turn cultural assimilation to normative French literature into the wholesale incorporation of continental romance into native tradition.

The implications of this study not only bridge academic disciplines by combining medieval French and Welsh studies on grounds other than a competitive quest for origins. It adds to both fields a new appraisal of the shift in the literary treatment of kingship that differentiates the historiography of

Geoffrey and Wace from the later genres of romance and *rhamant*. The Arthurian coherence explored here becomes perhaps most striking in light of the complexities of cultural transfer that are only beginning to be examined through modern political analyses. The greatest aim of this study is to call attention to both the similarities and the equally profound differences that give these texts such richness.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Notable examples include: Forde, Johnson, and Murray; Davis; M. R. Warren, “Making Contact,” Biddick 3–12; Freedman and Spiegel; Cohen, “Introduction: Midcolonial.”
2. As remarked by Kathleen Davis, “Balibar thus defines the Middle Ages as a negative in terms of a modern positive, and his attempt to resist an imperial, teleological narrative paradoxically reaffirms the securely bounded, modern Western nation” (612).
3. M. R. Warren, “Making Contact” 115; Johnson, “Imagining Communities” 14. *Imagined Communities* has provided a fruitful and useful sounding board for medievalists, becoming in the words of Patricia Clare Ingham “an account of nation that medievalists love to hate” (8).
4. Short, “On Bilingualism” 467; Anderson 38: “In every instance [of a written vernacular], the ‘choice’ of language appears as a gradual, unselfconscious, pragmatic, not to say haphazard development. As such, it was utterly different from the self-conscious language politics pursued by nineteenth-century dynasts....”
5. A trend summarized by Werner, “Les Nations” 285–86.
6. This “awakening” (*réveil*) of national sentiment responded directly to previous ideas of a vegetative sleep, an incubation period (Werner, “Les Nations” 287, 285).
7. So did Flodoard of Reims describe the make-up of tenth-century Gaul (Werner, “Les Nations” 292).
8. For a careful and accessible study of modern and medieval notions of nation, see Geary.
9. Geary adopts the value-neutral term “ethnogenesis” (people formation) from the fifth-century historian, Herodotus of Halicarnassos. “Broad and nonjudgmental,” the term does not assume racial or biological differences among peoples (42–46).
10. For a compelling account of specifically modern constructions of medieval ethnic identities and nations, see Geary 15–40.
11. William the Conqueror (1066–1087) and his sons William Rufus (1087–1100) and Henry I (1100–1135) were Norman kings of England. Henry II (1154–1189), the son of Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou, became the first Angevin king of England.
12. The debate over origins may likely never be fully resolved, and opinions continue to diverge over whether Chrétien was a direct source for the Welsh romancers, or whether both corpora derived their shared features from oral tradition or from now-lost written sources. See, for instance, the opposing views of Roberts, “The Welsh Romance,” and R.

M. Jones, “Y Rhamantau Cymraeg.”

13. Donald Maddox, in *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien De Troyes: Once and Future Fictions*, has expertly charted Arthurian decline in the corpus of Chrétien de Troyes, identifying the poet's use of customary as the root of the social instability of romance.
14. Neither *Cligés* nor *Lancelot* was adapted into Welsh, exclusions perhaps explained by the fact that the heroes of these two romances were not traceable to general British legend or to tales of the Old North.
15. In his edition of the *Brut y Brenhinedd*, B. F. Roberts has suggested that this Arthur was revered as a symbol of successful Welsh resistance to foreign influence—whether political, cultural, or military: an all-Wales symbol that transcended regional rivalries.
16. For the native Welsh, Cynon and Cadwaladr were the figures prophesied to return and deliver Wales from Saxon (and later English) invaders. As noted by Sir Ifor Williams, “Arthur is never named as a promised deliverer” (*Armes Prydein*, 44n81). Outside of Wales, however, such prophecies were associated with Arthur. See Lloyd-Morgan, “Qui était,” and Bullock-Davies, “*Exspectare*.”

NOTES TO PART ONE

1. William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon; discussed below, 41–2.
2. J. Davies 49. In *De excidio Britonum* (The Ruin of Britain), ca. 540, Gildas chides the Britons, explaining the Saxon invasion as divine retribution for collective sin—see Winterbottom's introduction to his edition. Bede repeats this interpretation in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (The Ecclesiastical History of the English), ca. 730. A similar tone of loss continues into the tenth-century, darkening the *Armes Prydein*, ca. 929.
3. The *Historia Brittonum* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are exceptions. Mariannus Scotus, Florence of Worcester, and Simeon of Durham all fail to mention Arthur. See Fletcher 35.
4. Sims-Williams ("Early Welsh Arthurian Poems" 35) cautions against any such genre-based distinction, rightly reminding that "the Latin and Welsh texts share too many basic assumptions." I add Latin hagiography to Sims-Williams' list of histories and fictions. Most anthologies of Arthurian material are organized by genre, making such shared assumptions more difficult to perceive.
5. Particularly with regard to questions of date, I have relied on the work of several scholars who have covered this material in depth elsewhere: Coe and Young; Bollard, "Arthur;" Echard, *ANLT*; Fletcher; Hanning; Jarman, "Allusions;" Thomas Jones; and most recently Padel, *AMWL*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Gildas organizes his history in three parts: a description of Roman Britain and the coming of the Saxons (ch 2–26); a *planctus* against tyrannical kings (ch 27–65); a *planctus* against corrupt priests (ch 66–110).
2. This bias has prompted Fletcher to propose a “Roman faction” of historians led by Gildas, as opposed to the “British faction” represented by the Nennian history (19).
3. Hereafter *De excidio*, cited by chapter and paragraph. The Arthur of the Nennian history is discussed below, 19–24.
4. 25:2: *tam auide quam apes alveari* (like bees to the beehive).
5. 25:3: “Ambrosius Aurelianus ... perhaps alone of the Romans, had survived the shock of this notable storm [of the Saxon invasion]: certainly his parents, who had worn the purple, were slain in it.” Hanning discusses Eusebius of Caesarea's fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History* as providing a significant synthesis of individual hero and group salvation; Gildas' Ambrosius resembles Eusebius' Constantine: both are heroes who, “partak[ing] of the nature of both Christ and Caesar,” play out both providential and national history (32).
6. The eleventh-century *Chronicle of St Michael's Mount* likewise names Arthur the victor at Badon, but also its victim: recorded for the year 421 is both the birth of St Gildas and the death of *Artus Rex Britannorum* (Fletcher 34). The *Annales Cambriae* and Geoffrey of Monmouth identify Arthur's final battle as Camlan—in the year 537 and 542 respectively.
7. In the poetry of Taliesin and Aneirin, *draig* and *dragon* are used to mean chieftain or ruler (Sims-Williams, “Gildas and Vernacular Poetry” 186–190).
8. All twelve from the *Book of Taliesin*, which takes up pages 3–80 of NLW Peniarth MS 2 (14th-century) and contains some 57 poems, prophecies, and elegies falling into two categories: one comprised of material composed in the voice of a boastful, all-knowing, shape-shifting Taliesin, another of material by the sixth-century bard of Urien Rheged (I. Williams and J. E. C. Williams). Poems cited by Roman numeral and line number from the Williams and Williams edition.
9. Williams and Williams have pointed out that in describing Urien as chieftain (*gwledig*) and ruler (*llyw*) of Catraeth, these poems seem to pre-date *Y Gododdin*'s elegy for those slain in the battle to regain Catraeth from the Saxons (xlvihi). For *Y Gododdin*, see below, 15–18.
10. In poem II Urien is described as *blawr gofedon* (gray-haired ruler, 18), and 35n. Five of these eight poems are translated and annotated by Morris-Jones.
11. English translation by Bollard, “Arthur” 15. It is interesting to note in Taliesin's poetry, as elsewhere in Welsh, metaphors that align heroes with animals of prey. As noted earlier, Gildas reserves likenesses to wolves and other predators for the Saxon enemy.
12. X: 11–12: *Pan ladawd Owein fflamdwyn./ Nyt oed uwy nocet kysceit* (When Owein

killed Fflamdwyn, it was no more than sleeping).

13. X:6–7: *escyll gawr gwaywawr llifeit./ cany cheffir kystedlyd* (his whetted spears were like the dawn's rays, since no equal is found).
14. Nennius, *British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. & trans. John Morris, §62. Hereafter *HB*, cited by chapter. Square brackets added into the English translation; on the Welsh names, see Bromwich's notes in I. Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry* 43–44nn7–8.
15. The *HB* associates poet and patron only indirectly, naming Aneirin in §62 and detailing the campaigns and assassination of Urien in §63.
16. The longest of the four *gorchanau* is accredited in the manuscript to Aneirin's contemporary, Taliesin (lxv–lxviii).
17. Koch; *Y Gododdin*, lxviii–lxxv; Bollard, “Arthur;” I. Williams, *Beginnings* 45–49, and at 50–53, where he refers to the older B text as an “appendix” to the A text. Dumville discounts the relevance of Old Welsh orthography as evidence for dating, establishing that archaic spelling could have persisted until c. 1100 (27).
18. Allowing for the possibility of a later addition to the original, Jarman still supposes a date no later than the ninth century, so that stanza 99, even as a later interpolation, would date to “any time before the arrival of the written B text in Wales in the course of the ninth century” (*Y Gododdin* lxxiii).
19. *The Book of Aneirin* “need be mentioned only in passing” as a source for early Arthurian poems: its Arthurian reference is “of uncertain antiquity,” and despite the level of its praise “alas, no one can say for certain when it was composed” (“Early Welsh Arthurian Poems” 37). Sims-Williams refers to A. O. H. Jarman, “The Delineation of Arthur in Early Welsh Verse.”
20. In his article Howlett omits Taliesin, Aneirin, and seven Cambro-Latin Arthurian *vitae*, either in ignorance or on the grounds of imprecise dating.
21. Bollard, “Arthur in Early Welsh Tradition” 15: “And the horse of Gwythur and the horse of Gwawrddur/ and the horse of Arthur, fearless in causing pain.”
22. All without specific patronymic: *Y Gododdin*, lines 205, 210, 246, 367, 383, 390, 393, 638, 924, 1057, 1115.
23. See the proper name index in Jarman's edition, *Y Gododdin* 201–205.
24. Bede's account of Saxon conquest forms, in Hanning's analysis, a uniquely national and hagiographical history, esp. in comparison to the sixth-century *Historia Francorum* of Gregory of Tours (67–71).
25. Nennius is named in the eleventh-century prologue as a student of “the holy Elvodug (Elfoddw),” ardent supporter of the Roman Easter. In the wake of David Dumville's work, many consider this ascription to be spurious.
26. *Scotti autem, qui sunt in occidente, et Picti de aquilone pugnabant unanimiter et uno impetu contra Brittones indesinenter ...* (But the Irish, who are in the west, and Picts

from the north, fought together in a united assault on the British unremittingly ...).

27. Such as Hengest's false peace treaty detailed in §45, and again in §46: *Et conventum adduxerunt, et in unum convenerunt, et Saxones, amicaliter locuti, in mente interim vulpicino more agebant, et vir juxta virum socialiter sederunt. Hengistus, sicut dixerat, vociferatus est, et omnes seniores trecenti Guorthigirni regis jugulati sunt, et ipse solus captus, et catenatus est ...* (The conference assembled, and the English, friendly in their words, but wolfish in heart and deed, sat down, like allies, man beside man. Hengest cried out as he had said, and all the three hundred Seniors of king Vortigern were murdered, and the king alone was taken and held prisoner.)

28. *Brittones autem dejecerunt regnum Romanorum neque census dederunt illis neque reges illorum acceperunt, ut regnarent super eos, neque Romani ausi sunt ut venirent Britanniam ad regnandum amplius, quia duces illorum Brittones occiderant.*

29. The *HB* refers collectively to the Welsh kings of Builth, Powys, and Gwynedd as *Brittones* (once as *cives*, which Morris translates as *Cymry*, the modern Welsh word for the Welsh people), and it identifies British-Welsh ancestry in two separate origin myths: one tracing the British back to “Brutus the Hateful,” the Trojan grandson of Aeneas; another tracing a biblical genealogy of the British from Brutus and his grandfather Alanus back to Japheth and Adam, “the first formed,” “son of the Living God” (*HB* §10). These Brutus tales are not recounted by either Gildas or Bede, so that the Nennian compilation preserves a providential history of Britain while also constructing a secular, national, and heroic history.

30. Daggers in the text indicate later additions not found in Harleian MS 3859.

31. Armies of the Deirans and Bernicians resoundingly defeat the British in *Y Gododdin*. The tables are turned when, in the *HB*, the king of Gwynedd wipes out the royal house of Deira (§61).

32. The *Mirabilae* are discussed later in this section, 23–4; the *Annales* 24.

33. As claimed in the *praefatio*: † ... *quia nullam peritiam habuerunt neque ullam commemorationem in libris posuerunt doctores illius insulae Britanniae. Ego autem coacervavi omne quod inveni tam de annalibus Romanorum quam deronicis sanctorum patrum, et de scriptis Scottorum Saxonumque et ex traditione veterum nostrorum* † († ... for the scholars of the island of Britain had no skill, and set down no record in books. I have therefore made a heap of all that I have found, both from the Annals of the Romans and from the Chronicles of the Holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Irish and the English, and out of the tradition of our elders†).

34. *Nam, super omnia mala adjiciens, Guorthigirinus accepit filiam sui uxorem sibi, et peperit ei filium* (Then, on top of all his misdeeds, Vortigern took his daughter to wife, and begot a daughter upon her §39). Later in §48 the text identifies Faustus as Vortigern's son by incest: *Quartus [filius] fuit Faustus, qui a filia sua genitus est illi* (A fourth son was Faustus, who was born to him by his daughter).

35. *'Ambrosius vocor,' id est Embreis Guletic ipse videbatur* (“I am called Ambrosius,” that is, he was shown to be Emrys the Overlord §42).

36. Cafal leaves this footprint in Builth during the hunt across Britain for the boar Twrch Trwyth, a hunt recounted at length in the later native Welsh prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*

(see below, 28–34).

37. In Harleian MS 3859, the *Annales* is added at the end of the Nennian compilation, following §66. In his edition, Morris enters the *Annales* after the *Mirabiliae*, following §75. Coe and Young date this text to 954, the date of its last entry.
38. *Humerus* is here the possible mistranslation of the Welsh word *ysgwyd*, meaning “shield” in the seventh-century poetry of Aneirin and Taliesin. *Ysgwydd* (ending with -dd rather than -d) means “shoulder,” and in this context might indicate something like embroidered epaulettes; in the later Welsh romances, *ysgwyd* means shoulder: e.g. *Ystoria Gereint uab Erbin*, lines 1247, 1251, 1256. Whatever the possibilities, Geoffrey of Monmouth later adorns Arthur's shield, not his shoulders, with the image of the Virgin.
39. Sims-Williams, “Early Welsh Arthurian Poems” 35; I. Williams, *Armes vi*.
40. The Black Book of Carmarthen contains the most notable collection of this poetry, but also important are the Red Book of Hergest and the White Book of Rhydderch.
41. Seven stanzas of the Black Book collection contain more than three lines. The Red Book of Hergest, Peniarth MS 98, and Wrexham MS 1 contain additional stanzas. All are edited and translated by T. Jones, “Stanzas,” 118–137, who dates them “as early as the ninth or tenth century” (100).
42. Stanza 38, for instance, echoes the enigmatic reference to the fortress (*caer*) of Oeth and Anoeth made by Arthur's porter in the prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*; stanzas 42 and 43 recall a version of the Taliesin story found in *Canu Llywarch Hen* (The Song of Llywarch the Old); the graves of figures known from *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (The Four Branches of the Mabinogi)—Dylan, Pryderi, Lleu Llawgyffes—are located in stanzas 4, 7, and 35; stanza 13 locates the graves of both Owein ap Urien and Rhydderch Hael, two heroes of the Old North praised by Taliesin and Adomnán of Iona (*Life of St. Columba*, 176–77n97); the graves of later Arthurian heroes Gwalchmai (Gauvain in French tradition) and Cynon are paired in stanza 8, and Bedwyr's grave is associated in stanza 12 with the “slaughter” of Camlan, the battle in which the *Annales Cambriae* records Arthur's death.
43. And at 106: “The existence of a stanza recording the grave of a hero, be he historical or not, must mean that some kind of story, whether it was simple or involved, was told of that hero.”
44. Jarman, “Arthurian Allusions” 112. Jarman dates this line to c. 1200–1250—the accepted date of the Black Book manuscript in which it is found. As cited above, T. Jones believes the principal seventy-three stanzas to be “considerably earlier,” “probably as early as the ninth or tenth century” (100).
45. T. Jones, “Stanzas,” stanza 44, 126–27: *Bet y March, bet y Guythur, / Bet y Gugaun Cledyfrut, / Anoeth bid bet y Arthur* (There is a grave for March, a grave for Gwythur, / A grave for Gwgawn Red-sword, / The world's wonder a grave for Arthur).
46. Arthur's absence from early praise poetry has been noted by Sims-Williams, “Early Welsh Arthurian Poems” 38: “... apparently [Arthur] did not dominate the early narrative tradition in the way he dominates *Culhwch ac Owen*, the three romances and the *Triads*.”

47. Notably by Padel, *AMWL* 36–7, 47–51; Jarman, “Arthurian Allusions;” Haycock; Sims-Williams, “Early Welsh Arthurian Poems.”
48. This is the earliest instance of the title “emperor” applied to Arthur.
49. With emendations based on Coe & Young (119) and Sims-Williams, “Early Welsh Arthurian Poems” (47).
50. Coe and Young explain that in the manuscript of the Black Book of Carmarthen, the seven stanzas beginning “I have been” immediately precede a dialogue poem. They print only the seven stanzas, yet remain uncertain whether or not the stanzas and the dialogue constitute independent poems. Jarman treats the seven stanzas as part of the dialogue. Other Arthurian dialogue poems, notably “Arthur and the Eagle” and “The Dialogue of Melwas and Gwenhwyfar,” circulated from the middle of the twelfth century (Padel, *AMWL* 64–71).
51. Poem 31 in the Black Book of Carmarthen, so called for its opening words. English translation in Bollard, “Arthur” 17–18. For a “tentative” tenth-century date, see B. E. Roberts, “*Culhwch*” 78n21.
52. In *Culhwch ac Olwen* and other later Welsh prose tales, Glewlwyd is Arthur's porter.
53. Poem 30 in the *Book of Taliesin* (NLW Peniarth 2). English translation in Bollard, “Arthur” 20–21.
54. On dating the tale, see Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch* xx–xxvii; B. F. Roberts, “*Culhwch*” 73; Charles-Edwards 174; Diverres, “Arthur” 54–56. All references from the tale are cited by line-number from the edition of Bromwich and Evans; translations are those of Jones and Jones and Patrick K. Ford.
55. Roberts, “*Culhwch*” 78. With alliterative passages, remarkable descriptions of the hero and Olwen (60–81; 487–98), a highly rhythmic and metrical catalogue of names (175–373), the rhetorical mastery of the *Culhwch* redactor is unequalled in contemporary Welsh prose. On the tale's distinct style, see the edition of Bromwich and Evans, lxxi–lxxvi.
56. *Culhwch* opens and closes with references to hair-cutting and shaving. *Culhwch's* father sends him to Arthur's court to request a trim from his cousin (“*Arthur yssyd geuynderw it. Dos titheu ar Arthur y diwyn dy walk, ac erchych hynny idaw yn gyuarws it,*” 57–9; Arthur is your first cousin. Go then to Arthur, to have your hair trimmed, and ask that of him as his gift to you, J. & J. 81, Ford 123); Caw and Goreu perform the final shave of Ysbaddaden (1230–41; J & J 113; Ford 157).
57. See Diverres, “Arthur” 57, for a differing assessment of Arthur's role in this tale.
58. *Reit yw ym olchi vym penn ac eillaw vym baryf. Yskithyr Yskithyrwyn Penn Beid a ynnnaf y eillaw ym... Ac yna y kymerth Kaw o Brydein nerth bwyellic, ac yn wychyr trebelit y doeth ef y'r baed, ac y hollides y benn yn deu hanner. A chymryt a oruc Kaw yr ysgithyr,* 638–40, 1017–20 (I must wash my head and shave my beard, and I want the tusk of Ysgithrwyn Chief Boar to shave with.... Then Caw armed himself with a small axe, fiercely and vigorously set upon the boar, split its head in two, and took the tusk, Ford 140, 152).

59. Kynllyuan o uaryf Dillus Varchawc [y rysswr mwyaf a ochelawd Arthur eiryoet], canyt oes a dalhio y deu geneu hynny namyn hi ... a tharaw dyrnawt arnaw anueitrawl y ueint a oruc, a'e wascu yn y pwll hyt pan darowed uduyt y gnithiau yn llwyr a'r kylllellbrenneu y uaryf. A gwedy hunny y lad yn gwbyl, 700–01, 960–1; 972–74 (... a leash made from the beard of Dillus the bearded [the greatest warrior who ever avoided Arthur], for there is nothing else that can hold those two pups.... Cei struck [Dillus] an enormous blow and stuffed him into a pit until they had plucked his beard completely.... Then they killed him outright, Ford 142, 150).
60. Nyf oes yn y byt crib a guelleu [tlysseu] y galler gwrteith vyg uallt ac wy, racy rynthet, namyn y grib a'r guelleu yssyd kyfrwg deu yskyuarn Twrch Trwyth mab Tared Wledic.... y kaffat y grib y gantaw. Ac odynd y holet ynteu o Gernyw, ac y gyrrwyf y'r mor yn y gyueir. Ny wybywyf vyth o hynny allan pa le yd aeth...., 667–69, 1025; 1200–02 (... because of its coarseness, there are no comb and shears in the world that can dress my hair except the comb and shears [the treasures] that are between the ears of Twrch Trwyth son of Taredd Wledig.... the comb was taken from [Twrch Trwyth]. Then he was chased out of Cornwall, and they drove him to the sea. No one ever knew after that where he went...., Ford 141, 152; 156).
61. Examining western European Latin historiography from 300–1200 (chronological limits “that seem to embrace the formation and prime of medieval historiography”), Roger D. Ray considers any strict designation of genre misplaced “in reference to an age that drew faint lines between history, liturgy, hagiography, exegesis, preaching, and poetry” (35). See also Gransden.
62. Wright, *Historia regum Britannie* §177, hereafter *HRB*; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History* 258, hereafter Thorpe.
63. For a detailed comparison of the miraculous in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and the *Life of Saint Cuthbert* see C. G. Loomis.
64. Like hagiographers, vernacular poets claimed written sources with remarkable frequency; see Mölk.
65. The *vitae* of Cadog, Carannog, Illtud, and Padarn are included in Wade-Evans, hereafter cited by *vita* and chapter. A Llannerch reprint has made the life of Gildas (1899) more accessible (H. Williams); for the lives of Breton saints Euflamm and Gouzenou (incomplete), see Le Moyne de La Borderie. In their anthology Coe & Young include the Arthurian section of each *vita* with an English translation (14–43). B. E Roberts claims that six out of the seven (all but the *Life of Illtud*) are pre-Galfridian; Knight similarly dates the lives to c. 1100 (*ALS*); for a dissenting opinion, see Howlett 65–66.
66. §56 of the *HB* records that Arthur fought his eighth battle carrying the image of the Virgin Mary on his shoulder or shield, and that his victory was due in part to her miraculous power. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur's thoughts were perpetually drawn to the Virgin by the painted image on his shield Pridwen (*HRB* §147; Thorpe 217). Later in the English tradition, it is Sir Gawain whose shield bears her image.
67. *Vita Gildae. auctore Caradoco Lancarbanensi*, in *The Two Lives of Gildas* §5. Hereafter *Gildas*. Arthur does not appear in the older Breton *Vita Gildae* ascribed to a Monk of Ruys.

68. Description of the thieves swallowed up by the earth at the instigation of the saint in *Vita Sancti Cadoci* §16. In *Vita Sancti Paterni* §21, it is Arthur himself who is swallowed by the earth for his iniquity.
69. Wade-Evans' now out-of-print *Vita Sanctorum Britanniae* remains the most definitive and readily accessible bi-lingual (Latin-English) compendium of Welsh saints' lives. The more recent work of Elissa R. Henken provides complete bibliographies of primary sources and exhaustive indexes of the Welsh *vitae*. Though the Arthurian texts have received some recent attention from Coe and Young and B. F. Roberts, they are more often excluded from discussions of early Arthurian material.
70. Geoffrey Ashe has argued that the incomplete *Vita Sancti Wohednouii* (life of Gouzenou) provided an important source for Geoffrey's Arthurian section, in particular his Gallic wars.
71. Both Putter and Kay address the coming together of clerics and courtiers in Champagne under the leadership of Henry the Liberal (1152–1181). Putter in particular equates Henry's literary patronage with his active recruitment of bureaucrats from the cathedral schools.
72. A saint's life, like any written document without a seal and unsubstantiated by a charter, would likely not have been recognized as evidence of title in royal courts from the time of Henry II's reign. But popular tales existed of symbolic objects being used as evidence, such as the rusty sword produced in court as proof of the Earl Warenne's claim to land won during the Norman Conquest (Clanchy 35–43).
73. The murder of Becket in 1170, as does the arrest and imprisonment of King Stephen's bishops in 1139, illustrates how the “spirit of harmony between king and Church” was dissolving during the twelfth century (G. White, esp. ch. one; quote at 23).
74. Although of royal birth-*quamuis regia proles*-Cadog *despiciebat pompam*. He prays not to succeed his father: *Iam non dominari, sed seruire, desidero* (§5). Carannog similarly *ad regna terrena tendere noluit* (§1).
75. *...tarn facile est generationem illius [Carannog] deducere ad Mariam, matrem Domini ...* (... so it is easy to trace his genealogy to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, *Carannog* §1); *sicut Christus ex summo Patre, Deus de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, ortus est, ita Paternus sanctus ex Sanctis parentibus nasceretur* (... as Christ was sprung from the supreme Father, God of God, Light of Light, so saint Padarn was born of holy parents, *Paternus* §2).
76. *Carannog* §1; *Illtud* §§4–10: Soon after Illtud became a monk, an angel directed him to “a certain woody valley towards the west,” the Hodnant valley claimed as hunting ground by King Meirchion the Wild.
77. The *vita* makes Padarn a Breton (*Armoricus*), apparently conflating two saints (Farmer 379).
78. Wade-Evans leaves “Britannia” unchanged in his translation.
79. *Contemporaneus Gildas vir sanctissimus fuit Arturi regis totius maioris Britanniae, quem diligendum diligebat, cui semper cupiebat obedire* (St. Gildas was the

contemporary of Arthur, the king of the whole of Britain, whom he loved exceedingly, and whom he always desired to obey, *Gildas* §5).

80. *intravit Satanas in corde Guorthigirni, ut amaret puellam, et postulavit eam a patre suo per interpretem suum et dixit: "Omne quod postulas a me impetrabis, licet dimidium regni mei"* (Satan entered into Vortigern's heart, and made him love the girl. Through his interpreter he asked her father for her hand, saying "Ask of me what you will, even to the half of my kingdom," *HB* §37).

81. To Hanning, the twelfth-century "revolution" of historiography is characterized by a tension between secular-national and ecclesiastical views of the past, or between "classical" history and the history of salvation (123–30).

82. According to Jarman, the only such "ditty" is the Black Book *englyn* discussed above from the *Englynion y Beddau* (26), making the single line of that stanza the sole evidence in Welsh (datable to 1200–1250) of a belief in the return of Arthur.

83. Unlike William, Henry was no monk, and this historical movement not exclusively monastic (Partner 14–15, 39–48).

84. On the dating of Henry's initial versions, see Greenway's introduction, lxxvi–lxxvii.

85. Henry first encountered Geoffrey "Arthur" of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britannie* on a visit to Le Bee, Normandy, in 1139. Though Henry made only limited revisions to his own *Historia Anglorum*, he based this letter on Geoffrey's *Historia*. Greenway traces Henry's dependence on sources throughout her edition.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. This title, taken from §1, was first adopted by Jerome Commelin in his edition of 1578. In manuscripts the work is most often entitled *Historia Brittonum*, and Geoffrey-in his *Vita Merlini*, line 1529-calls it the *Gesta Britonum* (*HRB* xii). Wright's edition supersedes that of Griscom. All references to Geoffrey's text cited by § from Wrights edition (*HRB*), followed by corresponding page number from Thorpe's English translation.
2. Standard accounts of Geoffrey's life include J. E. Lloyd, "Geoffrey;" Curley 1–6; *HRB* ix–x.
3. Once in the prologue and twice in the body of the text: *HRB* §§3, 110, 177.
4. "Both the chronicler Robert of Torigni and Henry of Huntingdon also refer to Geoffrey in this way" (*HRB* x). Some have suggested that Arthur was a patronymic; Wright considers it more likely to be a nickname (x); in two documents of 1151-before his consecration as bishop in February 1152-Geoffrey signs himself *Gaufridus episcopus sancti Asaphi* and *Gaufridus electus sancti Asaphi*.
5. Three of the charters were originated by Walter. On two occasions Geoffrey signed himself *magister*, perhaps indicating responsibilities as a teacher. See Salter for a list of the charters-and an argument of forgery that reduces their number from seven to six. Walter was the putative owner of the infamous "ancient British book" that Geoffrey claimed as the vernacular source for his *Historia*. "Geoffrey's contact with the Archdeacon Walter of his prologue was in no way casual, but was a close association of many years" (J. E. Lloyd, "Geoffrey" 464–5).
6. The so-called civil war was actually what Robert Bartlett recently termed "a particularly prolonged and vicious family feud"-Robert, Matilda, and Stephen were cousins, all grandchildren of William the Conqueror. Peace between Stephen and Robert ended in 1138 when Robert formally withdrew his support. Matilda's forces invaded England in September 1139 (Bartlett 6, 22).
7. On stylistic grounds, David Howlett confirms the priority of the dedication to Robert alone (35). The Stephen-Robert dedication is "manifestly a reworking of that to Robert and Waleran," and so later in date (*HRB* xiv–xv). Wright prints these three forms of the dedication side by side (*HRB* xiii–xiv).
8. *HRB* §§109, 110. The *Prophetie*, independent of the *Historia* in 85 manuscripts, circulated as early as 1135–1136, when Orderic Vitalis incorporated a chapter into his *Historia ecclesiastica* (Crick, "Geoffrey" 360n13).
9. On the bishop of Lincoln, see G. White 23; Bartlett 509; *HA* 471.
10. G. White 36–49: "It was the earl, rather than the empress, who was the effective power in much of the south-west peninsula" (43).
11. Stephen was the product of a marriage alliance between Adela, daughter of William the Conqueror, and Stephen, Count of Blois.
- 12.

The number of earldoms in England more than tripled in the initial years of Stephens reign (Bartlett 208). G. White describes the proliferation of earldoms as the “cheap form of patronage” adopted by Stephen to “pander to magnates' aspirations” (57).

13. Focusing on Henry of Huntingdon's use of the term “English” in his history, Gillingham suggests that the “Normans” were a court faction led by Waleran of Meulan, a faction opposed by the English, or insularly based Francophone magnates (Gillingham, “Henry of Huntingdon” 85).
14. Jean Blacker reports that Gloucester was the son of Henry I and “Nesta,” sister of the king of South Wales (*Faces of Time* 137). Nest, sister of Gruffydd ap Rhys of Deheubarth, was indeed famous in her time, but not as Gloucester's mother. “A lady of easy charm and many lovers,” her “ravishing beauty” inspired the daring and ultimately unsuccessful kidnapping escapade of Owain ap Cadwgan of Powys in 1109 (R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest* 71). Nest is also the grandmother of Gerald of Wales. Though it is enticing to think of Robert of Gloucester as descending equally from Welsh as from English royalty, I have come across no other identifying references to his mother.
15. Gloucester's military support extended well into Wales, and was strong enough to have compelled Welsh princes in 1141 to provide much needed relief as far east as Lincoln (Gillingham, “Foundations”).
16. “[The *HRB*] presents a particularly cogent example of the fantasy of empire and the ambivalence of colonial desire because it portrays the forgotten empire of a marginalized people in reaction to an urgently present colonial dynamic” (M. R. Warren, “Making Contact” 116).
17. The so-called “arrest of the bishops,” which realigned power in favor of the Beaumont brothers. Discussed by G. White 23–26; Gillingham has “no doubt that the bishops were the victims of a court intrigue organized by the faction headed by the elder of the Beaumont twins, Waleran of Meulan” (“Henry of Huntingdon” 81).
18. Stephen was held captive by Robert of Gloucester for nine months (G. White 26, 36–7).
19. In 1152 Geoffrey became bishop of St. Asaph, located in territory only recently reclaimed (in 1150) by Owain Gwynedd as part of his kingdom of northeast Wales. The political volatility of the area likely kept Geoffrey from ever visiting his cathedral (*Brut y Brenhinedd* xi).
20. *Yn y ulwydyn honno [1155] y bu uarw Jeffrei, escob Llan Daf, a Rosser, jarll Henfford[d]* (In that year died Geoffrey, bishop of Llandaff, and Roger, earl of Herford). J. E. Lloyd discounts as “untrustworthy” this account of Geoffrey's association with Llandaff, Glamorgan (“Geoffrey of Monmouth,” 461–64).
21. Though few now would defend Geoffrey as, in Valerie Flint's phrase, a “sober historian,” in his 1966 study of four “fall of Britain” texts Robert Hanning devoted a lengthy chapter to Geoffrey's contribution to medieval insular historiography, analyzing the *Historie's* sophistication as the first secular national history (121–72).
22. Though specific to vernacular French literature of a later period, Spiegel's phrase equally encapsulates the ambiguous complexity of Geoffrey's use of Latin.
23. Though she stresses the complex originality of Geoffrey's style, Echard stops short at an

argument for the direct influence of the *Historia* either on other Latin writing of the Angevin period or on later vernacular retellings of Arthurian material (ANLT 52).

24. The focus of Echard's chapter, "'The Anger of Saturn shall fall:' Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* and the limits of history" (ANLT 31–67).

25. ... quod nee uoce nee scripto horum temporum noticiam, sepissime querends, inuenire potui ... Hoc tamen anno, cum Romam proficiscerer, apud Beccensem abbatiam scripta rerum predictarum stupens inueni. (... although I searched again and again, I was unable to find any report of those times, either oral or written.... But this year, when I was on the way to Rome, to my amazement I discovered, at the abbey of Le Bee, a written account of those very matters, HA sect, viii, Letter to Warin §1).

26. R. W. Southern: "Personally I am convinced that the source which [Geoffrey] claimed to have received from Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, really existed" (194).

27. Howlett demonstrates that the histories of these "obsessive revisers," indebted to biblical poetics and classical rhetoric, are similarly structured by chiasmic and parallel arrangement of words and ideas; thematic import of the golden section; symmetry of lines, words, and letters; parts divisible by extreme and mean ratios; consistent use of balanced doublets and cursus rhythms.

28. Shichtman and Finke have likewise described the *Historia* as "an entry in a competition" (35).

29. One example: "Geoffrey's source, the book which, it seems necessary to repeat again and again, was, according to Geoffrey's own statement and the internal evidence of proper names and material, of Breton origin" (R. S. Loomis 18).

30. Dominica Legge helped in part to resolve this "either-or" question, emphasizing instead the number and variety of both Geoffreys' sources and his contacts. In 1969 she tied the "Lincoln circle" of historiographers to Caen, recalling that the earliest reference to a copy of the *Historia* comes from the continent, where Robert of Torigni showed a copy to Henry of Huntingdon at Le Bee, Normandy, in 1139. (The "Lincoln circle" refers to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and their patron Alexander of Blois, Bishop of Lincoln.)

31. Ashe suggests that a Breton-Latin *Vita* could have fit the bill as a "British" book (304–310).

32. As evidence, Lloyd discussed the fiction-created by Iolo Morgannwg-of Geoffrey's tie to Wales; the Breton settlement in Monmouth; and the rarity in Welsh of the names Geoffrey and Arthur. More persuasive to Lloyd were Geoffrey's literary representations of the insular versus continental British (see also "Geoffrey of Monmouth").

33. Other prominent historians and literary critics of medieval Wales agree: "Geoffrey's History shows scant sympathy for the Welsh" (R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest* 106); Rachel Bromwich described Geoffrey as "a Norman-Breton ecclesiastic" (*Trioedd* lxxxv); and in the words of Robert Bartlett, Geoffrey's Arthur is "a hero of the aristocracy of the Anglo-French" (249).

34. At the height of his power (some 40 years after the *Historia* first appeared), Henry II was King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Anjou, Touraine, and

Maine, and Suzerain of Toulouse and Ireland. By the mid 1170s he had also received homage from various Welsh and Scottish princes (Hollister).

35. In his direct response to Gerould, R. S. Loomis disputed not so much Geoffrey's Norman bias but the idea that he consciously modeled his Arthur on Charlemagne (18–19). The main critical point of the essay was, however, to discount Gerould's label of Geoffrey as "the father of Arthurian romance."

36. As Gerould put it, "the Welsh of that day did not furnish prime ministers to England, with deaneries and bishoprics in their gift" (38). Geoffrey did not, however, receive quick or grand reward from the Normans. In the words of Shichtman and Finke, "Geoffrey's patrons received much more than they gave in return. In exchange for relatively minor ecclesiastical promotion, Geoffrey of Monmouth provided them with the ancestry of King Arthur" (35).

37. Henry I had already imitated the healing touch of the Capetians, similarly asserting his own dynastic gift of sovereignty. What he lacked was a dynastic hero.

38. "[Such puns] are fine examples of the ironies by which a member of a marginal group justifies to himself and his peers the ideological work he does for another, more powerful group on whom he depends for a living" (*ALS*65-6).

39. This requires the prodigious conflation of Anglo-Saxon and Briton. "The story of Brutus served to legitimize the Anglo (and British) half of the dual ancestry of the Anglo-Normans" (166). According to Dudo, the Norman's Viking ancestors descended from the Trojan Antenor, while in Geoffrey, it is Aeneas' great-grandson, Brutus, who founds Britain. Later tradition remembered both Antenor and Aeneas as infamous traitors-not so here.

40. Also at 110: "[Geoffrey] was writing just at the time when the learned Anglo-French world with which he was familiar was beginning to despise Welshmen, to write off the Britons as barbarians, as brutish creatures without a history. It is in this fundamental sense that his history was inspired by Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury." See also Gillingham's "Beginnings."

41. Profiting from the instability of the early years of Stephen's reign, the "great revolt" of 1136–37—so-called by Sir John Edward Lloyd—regained for allied Welsh princes all of the territory (and more) that had been previously lost to Henry I.

42. Gillingham attributes the term "counter history" to Rees Davies. The counter history model necessarily dilutes the notion of Geoffrey as Breton-French propagandist.

43. The multilingual mobility of storytellers has been expertly researched in the short study by Bullock-Davies, *Professional*.

44. As suggested by Gillingham, "no medieval Welshman made the mistake of thinking Geoffrey anti-Welsh" ("Context" 110).

45. Geoffrey addresses his patrons in the dedication(s), and once in the body of the text (§177), where he addresses Gloucester as *consul auguste*. The Welsh he castigates as the *odiosa gens* of §185, deprived of sovereignty by their insatiable lust for civil war.

46. Per the recent work of Julia Crick, as of 1995 there are 217 Latin manuscripts.

47. Until recently attributed to Gaimar, the *Description* is extant in four texts, three of which are incorporated into the *Estoire des Engleis* (Johnson, "The Anglo-Norman *Description*" 13–17).
48. Translation mine. Cited also by Gillingham, "Context" 112; O. J. Padel, "The Nature of Arthur" 11.
49. Layamon claims that Wace dedicated his *Roman de Brut* to Henry's Queen, Eleanor (Wace and Layamon ix).
50. As pointed out by Gillingham ("Context" 103), it is only after the unearthing of Arthur's dead and still wounded body from its grave in Glastonbury that the French kings of England were able to make political use of him. Richard I was the first to do so, adopting a dragon banner and claiming to possess Arthur's sword *Caliburne* (Bartlett 251). For a resume of the Tudor claim to Arthur and for a general account of the Welsh reception of Geoffrey up to the eighteenth century, see B. F. Roberts' Appendix to *Brut y Brenhinedd*, "The *Historia Regum Britanniae* in Wales," 55–74.
51. The *Brutus exosus* of the *HB* (Brutus the exile, translated "hateful" by Morris)-great-grandson of Aeneas and hated presumably for killing his parents-will become in Geoffrey's history the first great British hero-king.
52. Such as in *De excidio* §§5–7. In the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Bede recounts the conquest of the "barbarians" of Britain by Julius Caesar and the emperor Claudius (v 1, Bk I, chs 2–3). The conquests of Caesar and Claudius are repeated again in *HB* §§19–21.
53. ... *loquela gentis que prius Trioana siue curuum Grecum nuncupabatur dicta fuit Britanni*<c>a §21 (The language of the people, which had up to then been known as Trojan or Crooked Greek, was called British, 72).
54. As the British king Cassivelaunus explained to Julius Caesar: *Obprohrium itaque tibi petiisti, Cesar, cum communis nobilitatis uena Britonibus et Romanis ab Enea defluat et eiusdem cognationis una et eadem catena prefulgeat qua in firmam amicitiam coniungi deberent* §55 ([The subjection] you have sought from us, Caesar, is an insult to yourself, for a common inheritance of noble blood comes down from Aeneas to Briton and to Roman alike, and our two races should be joined in close amity by this link of glorious kinship, 108).
55. Following a series of British victories against the emperor, domestic intrigue-Mordred's treachery-cuts short Arthur's Roman campaign (§§166–176; Thorpe 241–257).
56. Putter writes specifically of how, starting with Wace, romancers made creative use of the chronological *lacunae* left in Geoffrey's *Arthuriad*. But before Wace it was Geoffrey himself who perfected the strategy of "fit[ting] new Arthurian matter into the historical tradition" ("Finding Time" 3). Echard has described the *Historia* as a "series of king portraits" (*ANLT* 48).
57. *Postremo defuncto Cunedagio successit e<i> Riuallo filius ipsius, iuuenis pacificus atque fortunatus, qui regnum cum diligentia gubernauit. In tempore eius cecidit pluuiis tribus deibus sanguinea et muscarum affluentia homines moriebantur. Post hunc successit Gurgustius filius eius (§33).*

58. The Arthuriad, which I mean to comprise the reigns of Vortigern, Vortimer, Aurelius Ambrosius, Uther Pendragon, and Arthur, makes up 60 of 208 chapters (§§118–178; 186–261); 41 chapters cover Arthurs lifetime from the story of his conception (§§137–178; 204–261).
59. It is likely the opposition of fierce battle scenes with the opulence of Arthur's peace-time plenary court that prompted G. H. Gerould to describe Geoffrey as the “father of Arthurian romance” (35). As will be discussed below, there is very little of the Galfridian Arthur in later French or Welsh romance.
60. The Prophecies of Merlin comprise *HRB* §§109–117 (Thorpe 170–185); Arthur's reign §§143–178 (212–261); the Angelic Voice §§205–206 (282–283).
61. *Supradicta namque mortalitas et fames atque consuetudinarium discidium in tantum coegerat populum superbum degenerare quod hostes longius arcere nequiverant. Barbariae etiam irrepente iam non uocabantur Britones sed Gualenses....* (The plague about which I have told you, the famine and their own inveterate habit of civil discord had caused this proud people to degenerate so much that they were no longer able to keep their foes at bay. As the foreign element around them became more and more powerful, they were given the name of Welsh instead of Britons ...).
62. Nicholas Higham has contended that by the ninth and tenth centuries, the Old English term *w(e)alh* (foreign) had become “synonymous with slavery” (192).
63. *quinque inhabitatur populis: Normannis uidelicet atque Britannis, Saxonibus, Pictis et Scotis. Ex quibus Britones olim ante ceteros a mari usque ad mare insederunt donec ultione diuina propter ipsorum superueniente superbiam Pictis et Saxonibus cesserunt,* §5 (Britain is inhabited by five races of people, the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts and the Scots. Of these the Britons once occupied the land from sea to sea, before the others came. Then the vengeance of God overtook them because of their arrogance and they submitted to the Picts and the Saxons, 54). The *Angli* of other contemporary histories are notably absent from this list.
64. Echard suggests that Merlin's later prophecy regarding Aurelius—that he will bring peace but will die by poison—makes for anxious reading, for one cannot “relax and appreciate his accomplishments” knowing that he will die by treachery (*ANLT* 45). But the reader has foreknowledge of pending disaster from the outset, so that the narrative fixity on the reign of Arthur emphasizes his glory and success rather than his imminent fall.
65. The island is described as *deserta* and as *a nemine inhabitabatur* (§ 16)—later as *a nemine exceptis paucis hominibus gigantibus inhabitabatur* (§21). Geoffrey's Trojan-British conquest of insular giants is retold from a Norman-French perspective in the anonymous fourteenth-century romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* (see T. Jones, “Geoffrey”).
66. He “kills” his mother in childbirth, his father in a hunting accident (§6; 54–55).
67. *Erat enim inter sapientes sapiens, inter bellicosos bellicosus, et quicquid auri uel argenti siue ornamentorum adquirebat totum militibus erogabat* (Among the wise he was himself wise, and among the valiant he too was valiant. All the gold and silver and the equipment which he acquired he handed over to his soldiers, §7; 55).
68. *cubilia sopitorum ingrediuntur, letiferos ictus ingeminant. Et nullum pietatem habentes*

castra in hunc modum deambulant §13 ([The Trojans] quickly drew their swords, went into the sleeping-quarters of the unconscious enemy and with deadly effect dealt blow after blow. In this way [they] moved forward through the camp, showing pity to none, 60–1).

69. ... *ad internicionem deleuerat. Ut igitur noctem in hunc modum consumpserunt et sub luce aurore tanta ruina patuit populi, Brutus matutino gaudio...* §14 (They succeeded in killing everyone they found. It was in this way that they passed the night, and the light of dawn revealed just how many of the people there they had destroyed. As a result Brutus was beside himself with joy, 61).

70. Embedded in the tale of Brutus' victory over the Greeks is a tacit reminder, voiced in the advice of one of Brutus' Trojans, of the lasting hate born of oppression: *Nam si eo pacto uitam concesseritis Pandraso ut per eum partem Grece adepti inter Danaos manere uelitis, numquam diuturna pace fruemini dum fratres et filii et nepotes eorum quibus externam intulistis stragem nobis uel immixti uel uicini fuerint. Semper enim necis parentum suorum memores eterno uos habebunt odio. Quibusque etiam nugis incitati uindictam sumere nitentur* §14 (If you grant Pandrasus his life on condition that he allows you to occupy a part of Greece and remain there among the descendants of Danaus, you will never enjoy lasting peace as long as the brothers, sons and grandsons of those on whom you have inflicted decisive defeat remain intermingled with you or as your neighbors. They will always remember the slaughter of their relatives and they will hate you forever. They will take offence at the merest trifles and they will do all in their power to take vengeance, 62).

71. *Brutus de nomine suo insulam Britoniam appellat sociosque suos Britones.... loquela gentis ... dicta fuit Britanni* <c>a §§20, 21 (Brutus called the island Britain from his own name, and his companions he called Britons.... the language of the people ... was called British, 72).

72. The city is later renamed with a Welsh word as the 'fortress of Lud' (*Kaerlud*). It eventually becomes *Lundene*, changed by conquering foreign invaders to the French *Lundres*. Changes in power can be discerned in the city's several name changes: *Troia Nova, Trinouantum, Kaerlud, Kaerlundein, Lundene, Lundres* (§§22, 53; 73–4; 106).

73. For the division of Britain, see §23. Roberts calls attention to the thematic prominence in Geoffrey's *Historia* of the Welsh myth of political unity—a myth common also to many of the Latin sources discussed in the previous chapter. New with Geoffrey is the alignment of this myth with native sovereignty, and its elaborate embodiment in the figure of King Arthur.

74. In a replay of the scene between Vortigern and the Saxon beauty Renwein, Uther falls disastrously in love with the wife of his loyal Duke of Cornwall, Gorlois. When Cornwall retreats with his wife to his castle in Tintagel, Uther declares war; Cornwall is one of the first to die. With Merlin's magic, Uther takes on the physical appearance of the Duke, gains entrance to Tintagel, sleeps with Igera, and conceives Arthur (§§137–138; 204–208).

75. Arthur's reign consists of three periods of military campaigning—in Britain; Norway, Denmark, and Gaul; and against the Romans—that alternate with periods of lasting peace and celebration: a twelve-year peace, and a nine-year sojourn in Gaul that blends into the lavish festivities of Arthur's Whitsuntide plenary court in Caerllion.

- 76.

Ecclesias usque ad solum destructas renouat atque religiosis cetibus uirorum ac mulierum exornat § 151 (221).

77. *Preualebit tandem oppressa et seuicie exterorum resistet. Aper etenim Cornubie succursum prestabit et colla eorum sub pedibus conculcabit* §112 (The race that is oppressed shall prevail in the end, for it will resist the savagery of the invaders. The Boar of Cornwall shall bring relief from these invaders, for it will trample their necks beneath its feet, 171).

78. Geoffrey is careful to make the pre-Christian Brutus a religious man, and it is in response to his sacrifice that Diana sends the vision of his New Troy. Not until the reign of Lucius, the eighty-first king of the *Historia*, is Christianity introduced into Britain (§72).

79. "I myself will keep faith with my God. This very day I will do my utmost to take vengeance on [the Saxons] for the blood of my fellow-countrymen,"216 (*[E]go fidem Deo meo conseruans sanguinem conciuum meorum hodie in ipsos uindicare conabor* §146).

80. Wright notes that these words "form an internally rhymed hexameter line"(104n). Ron is "thirsty" for slaughter in Thorpe's translation (217).

81. Thorpe renders *indignatus est Arturus* as "Arthur went berserk"(217), melding pagan violence and Christian devotion with more color than Geoffrey's Latin.

82. Arthur's defeat and subsequent pardon of Scotland, inspired by the humble submission of barefoot, begging Scottish churchmen, reemphasizes Arthurs territorial jurisdiction over the whole of Britain and strikes me as a direct response to many hagiographic scenes of Arthur's defeat or public humiliation at the hands of a saint. We are far here from the Arthur of the *Vita Sancti Carantoci*, so often "swooped" upon from Scotland and rebelled against by rivals: "... all the bishops of this pitiful country, with all the clergy under their command, their feet bare and in their hands the relics of their saints and the treasures of their churches, assembled to beg pity of the King for the relief of their people. The moment they came into the King's presence, they fell on their knees and besought him to have mercy on their sorrowing people. He had inflicted sufficient suffering on them, said the bishops, and there was no need for him to wipe out to the last man those few who had survived so far. He should allow them to have some small tract of land of their own, seeing that they were in any case going to bear the yoke of servitude. When they had petitioned the King in this way, their patriotism moved him to tears. Arthur gave in to the prayers presented by these men of religion and granted a pardon to their people [the Scots],"219–220 (... *conuenerunt omnes episcopi miserande patrie cum omni clero sibi subdito reliquias sanctorum et ecclesiastica sacra nudis ferentes pedibus, misericordiam regis pro salute populi sui imploraturi. Mox ut presentiam regis habuerunt, flexis genibus deprecati sunt ut pietatem supra contrita gente haberet. Satis etenim periculi intulerat nec opus erat perpaueos qui remanserant usque ad unum delere. Sineret illos portiunculam habere patrie perpetue seruitutis iugum ultro gestaturos. Cumque regem in hunc modum rogauissent, commouit eum pietas in lacrimas sanctorumque uirorum petitioni adquiescens ueniam donauit*§149).

83. Following the subjection of the island kingdoms to his rule, Arthur returns to Britain for twelve peaceful years: *regni sui in firmam pacem renouans moram .xii. annis ibidem fecit* (§153; 222).

84.

Cum igitur sollennitas pentecostes aduenire inciperet, post tantum triumphum maxima leticia fluctuans Arturus affectauit ilico curiam tenere regnique diadema capiti suo imponere... § 156 (When the feast of Whitsuntide [Pentecost] began to draw near, Arthur, who was quite overjoyed by his great success, made up his mind to hold a plenary court at that season and place the crown of the kingdom on his head, 225–226).

85. Thorpe made the same point: “The *History* is a succession of battles no less than a sequence of kings; yet each battle is different”(26).

86. In his discussion of medieval France, Bernard Guenée has similarly posited “un lien étroit” between French historiography and what he identifies as the earliest expression of the French nation, *natione gallicus* (26–27).

NOTES TO PART TWO

1. On the “exceptional literary precocity” of Normandy and Britain, see Short, “Patrons.” Continental studies include: Baldwin, “Image;” Stanger; Benton, “Court.” The privileged position granted to poets in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Welsh courts is attested in the seven volumes and 12,600 lines of Welsh praise poetry from this period edited under the direction of R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Cyfres Beirdd Tywysogion I–VII*.
2. Ian Short defines “Insular French” linguistically rather than geographically to include the duchy of Normandy as well as Britain; he reserves “Continental French” to refer to all other *langue d’oil* areas (“Patrons” 229nl).
3. See Werner, “Kingdom;” Bisson, “Medieval Lordship” and “Princely Nobility.”
4. The Flemish in particular earned a reputation for commandeering Welsh land. See, e.g., *Brut y Tywysogyon* 53.
5. Davies (“Henry I and Wales” 133), referring to the claim made by the *Gesta Stephani*: *ut secunda esse Anglia per facile crederetur* (16–17).
6. On the scholarly contention surrounding the notion of an Angevin empire (i.e., was it accident or preconceived intention), see W. L. Warren, *Henry II* 45–7; Le Patourel, *Feudal Empires* IX: 1–17; Hollister 235–242. For a parallel discussion of continental kingship, see Haidu, *Subject* 110–11.
7. And later: “the French princes, who had long avoided the royal court and pursued their own political ends, now came to think of influence at court as the most certain road to political success, and thus showed where the center of gravity now lay” (270–71).
8. The “triumph” begins in the second half of Philip II’s reign, and is first marked in 1201 and 1202 by control over the wardship of both Champagne and Flanders, and later punctuated by both the trial of his recalcitrant duke, King John of England, and subsequent conquest of Normandy in 1203–1204.
9. For augmenting the royal domain with the annexation of the Vermandois in 1185 (and again in 1213) and the conquest of Normandy in 1204, Philip II earned the nickname “Augustus” by his biographer and chronicler Rigord of Saint-Denis (Benton, “Revenue” 183; Baldwin, *GPA* 3, 261). It is Philip’s decisive victory against a united Europe at Bouvines in 1214 that clinches this title.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Chrétien's earliest romance, *Erec et Enide*, is traditionally dated to 1170, his unfinished *Conte du graal* to no later than the death of Philippe of Alsace at the siege of Acre in 1191. In his edition of Chrétien's works, Jean-Marie Fritz dates to the decade of the 1160s the Ovidian translations and the Tristan tale claimed by Chrétien in the opening eight lines of *Cligés* (Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans* 13).
2. The following paragraphs are indebted to Baldwin, *GPA* (3–24) and Spiegel (14–53). On the comparative wealth and power of Louis VII and his son Philip II, see Benton, "Revenue" 183–190. I oversimplify the historical evolution that recuperated royal authority from post-Carolingian fragmentation; on the "slow recuperation of political sovereignty" that characterizes twelfth-century French kingship, see the detailed discussion in Haidu, *Subject* 101–119.
3. Le Patourel, *Norman Empire* 181, 231; Werner, "Kingship" 250. The house of Blois-Champagne builds itself into a great county over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries—Werner's example of an "*amasser*" model of princely power.
4. Champagne guaranteed safe travel to and from the fairs and paid full compensation to merchants in the event of robbery or attack—"a comprehensive system of protection of trade" with which Normandy and Flanders cooperated (Werner, "Kingdom" 262). See also Spiegel 24.
5. No royal financial records survive (Baldwin, *GPA* 12–13). Benton, following Robert Fawtier, has asserted differently that "even before 1180 the Capetian monarchy was, after the Church, the richest of all the powers in the kingdom" ("Revenue" 184).
6. For the early eleventh-century introduction into local government of removable officials, *prévôts* and *baillis*—the "most impressive achievement of the princes"—see Werner, "Kingdom and Principality" 256–57.
7. The infamous Capetian "aversion to courtly culture" holds true in the case of Philip Augustus only prior to 1200, from which point he endowed Gace Brule with a regular *fief-rente* (Baldwin, "Image" 661).
8. Henry the Liberal held additional lands from the Duke of Burgundy.
9. Traffic between Flanders and England was not solely commercial. Significant enclaves of Flemish settlers contributed to the "saga of colonization" in southwest Wales during the reign of Henry I, and Henry II bolstered his military forces with Flemish soldiers (Davies, *Conquest* 98–100).
10. As Werner explains it, "In west Francia/ France the king was simply shut out of the territories of the great princes by an almost complete transfer of the fisc to the princes themselves." And later: "Princely protection and princely charters became an equivalent and a substitute for royal protection and royal charters" ("Kingdom" 254, 255).
11. The marriage was declared void on grounds of consanguinity. For contemporary rumors of her "scandalous" behavior as queen, see W. L. Warren, *King John* 17–19; Haidu, *Subject* 108. Wace insists that Eleanor's reputation survived the divorce: *de celé départie*

n'out elle nul damage [Ron, line 31).

12. According to Robert Bartlett, “[Eleanor of Aquitaine] personifies the shift in the political geography that the Angevin succession represented”(37).
13. A strategy to which he forced his sons to comply. On the power and authority Henry wielded over his empire and his family, see Le Patourel, *Feudal Empires* IX: 11–13.
14. Henry the Liberal became count in 1152, after the death of his father Thibaut II of Blois.
15. Henry's uncle, Stephen, crowned himself King of England in 1135. Though Thibaut advanced no counterclaim, Robert Bartlett imagines him “squeezed out of the picture” by his younger brother (10).
16. Bur puts the number slightly higher (126), as does Werner (“Kingdom”260).
17. A realignment confirmed when Thibaut had himself buried in Troyes. Henry held only Meaux from the king of France; Troyes he held of the imperial duke of Burgundy.
18. The marriage took place by 1159 (Benton, “Court”6).
19. The highest court official below the king. For a description of the functions of a seneschal, see Werner, “Kingdom”258–59. Thibaut's influence at court was briefly eclipsed by the short-lived rise of Philippe of Alsace, who performed the role of seneschal at Philip Augustus' coronation in 1179.
20. For Louis, this marriage united the king with a direct descendant of Charlemagne (Haidu, *Subject* 108, 113).
21. Philip named Guillaume and Adèle co-regents of the realm during his absence on crusade.
22. Thibaut of Blois and Philippe of Flanders, both of whom died while accompanying Philip Augustus on the Third Crusade, are in fact the last great barons to appear in the king's *conseil*. Following his return from the Holy Land in 1191, Philip relied less on his barons than on a restricted number of “lesser knights and clerks,” a break with his magnates that fueled the aristocratic anxiety explored by Spiegel (17–19).
23. Werner has shown that Henry the Liberal used the word *balivus* as early as 1161 to indicate his highest ranking official (“Kingdom”187n61). Baldwin's assessment is that Philip of Flanders utilized a system of administrative agents to better effect than did the counts of Champagne.
24. The “spectacular promise” of Philippe's comital reign was never realized, and by the late 1220s Flanders was threateningly close to being annexed into the royal domain of France (Spiegel 30).
25. Spiegel attributes the nearly fifty-year dispute over the Vermandois succession—lasting from 1164 until the battle of Bouvines in 1214—with causing the stark reversal of political fortune faced by the counts of Flanders in the second half of Philip Augustus' reign (30–44).
26. In Baldwin's words: “Foiled by Henry II from manipulating the king [Philip II] from

within the royal court, Count Philippe turned to open defiance”(GPA 17). “Cyclical crises”involving open conflict between the Flemish aristocracy and the king of France later characterize the first half of the thirteenth century (Spiegel 25–6).

27. Gambles that ultimately proved disastrous for Flanders (Spiegel 34). Royal intervention in the conflicts of his vassals was a perfected strategy of Louis VII—part of the “unsung work of patient administration and alliance-building”that characterized his reign (Haidu, *Subject* 107); initiated by the count, such invitation into local government served to solidify royal authority and encourage broader centralization on the level of the kingdom as a whole.
28. The earliest were all financed by Flemish nobility. See Spiegel; and more recently M. R. Warren, *History on the Edge* esp. 171–221.
29. By 1204 King John had lost Normandy; by 1206 Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Poitou, and Brittany had likewise reverted to the French crown.
30. From roughly the beginning of the thirteenth century, Philip Augustus increasingly enforced his feudal overlordship beyond the confines of the royal domain, excluded the French aristocracy from participating in central government, and dissolved the aristocratic monopoly over war by hiring *cotereaux*, or non-knightly fighting forces. Such increasingly assertive kingship, combined with economic change that benefited the merchant class at the expense of the aristocracy, convert the unease of Chretien's day into full-fledged aristocratic crisis (Spiegel 18–23).
31. Whereas William I, William Rufus, and Henry I governed both England and Normandy under the sole title *rex Anglorum*, Henry II regularly signed himself *rex Anglorum et dux Normannorum et Aquitanorum et comes Andegavorum* (Hollister 215–218, 236; Le Patourel, *Feudal Empires* IX: 12).
32. Wace, in his *Roman de Brut*, is the first to describe Arthur's Round Table: *Fist Artus la Roonde Table/ Dont Breton dient mainte fable:/ Iloe s'eoient li vassal/ Tot chievalment et tot ingal;/ A la table ingalment s'eoient/ Et ingalment servi es-toient. I Nus d'als ne se pooient vanter/ Qu'il seist plus halt de son per;/ Tuit estaient assis moiainj Ne ni avoit nul de forain./ N'estait pas tenus por cortois/ Escos, ne Bretons, ne François,/ Normant, Angevin, ne Flamene,/ Ne Borgignon, ne Loherene,/ De qui que il tenist son feu/ Des ocident dusqu'à Mont Geu./ Qui à la cort le roi n'alast. . . lines 998–10,014 (Arthur made the Round Table, about which the Britons tell many tales. There his vassals sat, all royally and all equals: at the table they sat as equals and were served as equals. None of them could boast that he was higher than his peer. All of them were seated around it, for it had no corners. No man was considered courtly—not a Scot or a Breton or a Frenchman, a Norman, Angevin, or Fleming, not a Bour-gundian or a man of Lorraine, from the west as far as Mount Geu—who did not stay at Arthurs court). Translation mine.*
33. Criticism of Arthurian kingship nonetheless marks both *Erec et Enide* and *Cligés*, as will be discussed in [chapter 5](#).
34. *Yvain*, though undedicated, was written concurrently with *Lancelot*.
35. As noted by M. R. Warren, “Champagnes unique relations with the Capetian family make it a particularly rich site for narratives portraying ambivalence toward royal authority” (*History on the Edge* 172).

36. An approach that Short himself finds unconvincing (“Patrons”238n38). For persuasive evidence of Henry’s active role in patronizing literary ideologies of Anglo-Norman power, see the work of Jean Blacker on Angevin-era historiography, notably “La geste” and *Faces of Time*. The *romans antiques* provide similarly rich material for solidifying Norman claims to England, although evidence for Henry’s direct patronage is lacking.
37. For an abbreviated list of the works associated directly with Henry, see Haskins 74–76. See also Blacker, “La geste”387. Wace’s account of William I’s succession from Edward, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the Norman claim to England, offers a convincing explanation for both the unfinished nature of the *Roman de Rou* and for Henry’s replacement of Wace with Benoît as vernacular historian.
38. Gerald and Peter were functionaries of the king; Gerald, for instance, acted as negotiator between Henry and several Welsh princes (many of whom were his blood relatives); on Peter of Blois, see Dronke.
39. R. C. Johnston’s edition does much to recuperate this text as an “absolutely first-rate” literary creation (xvi). More to the current point, the linguistic complexity of the *Chronique* suggests to Johnston a political agenda: “Anglo-Norman, continental French, Provençal—is Jordan Fantosme writing thus in praise of Henry, king of England, duke of Normandy, and duke of Aquitaine?” (xxxiii).
40. *Prologue* 43. Some suggest that this dedication refers to Henry II, but it could be directed instead to the Young King, or even to John. As cautioned by Short, “there is no means of telling whether or not a genuine patronage relationship ever existed between” Marie and Henry—whatever that might consist of (“Patrons”239).
41. See also the remarkable list of Anglo-Norman literary “firsts” catalogued by Short (“Patrons” 229); Duggan 10.
42. As early as 1925, Charles Homer Haskins cautioned against claims that “the whole romantic movement had its genesis in Henry’s reign” and against the theory that “royal encouragement of Celtic legend” formed “a literary basis for a new British imperialism” (72).
43. Chrétien de Troyes, *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, v. I. *Erec et Enide*. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *Erec* are cited by line number from this edition.
44. On Henry’s military incursions in Brittany and his *mainmise totale* of the duchy, see Le Patourel, *Feudal Empires* X: 101–04; and more recently, Everard, *Brittany and the Angevins* 34–52.
45. *Erec* 1873–1962; Duggan 10 (citing Fourier); Schmolke-Hasselmann 232–33.
46. Gerald states further that Owain managed his land “sensibly” and ruled with “equity, prudence and princely moderation” (202–03). This same Owain joined the Welsh coalition of 1165, when princes of the three major principalities “all steadfastly united together” against the English king (*Bruty Tywysogyon* 145). *Bruianz des Illes* appears in line 6668 of *Erec*; *Yvain de Cavalhōt* in line 1705 of the edition of Jean-Marie Fritz.
47. Both cited by Bullock-Davies, “*Exspectare*” 438: *Contra clericos voluptati deditos*:

Neminem ab inferis/ Revertentem vidimus ... / Quibus si credideris/ Exspectare peteris Arcturum cum Britonibus (We see no one returning from the dead ... if you believe anyone can, you will be like the Britons, waiting for Arthur); Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae*: ... *ipsum exspectant adhuc venturum sicut Judaei Messiam suum maiori etiam fatuitate ... decepti* (they [the Britons] are still waiting for him to come, just as the Jews are awaiting their Messiah, led astray, indeed, by a greater foolishness).

48. Gerald's accounts of Henry's location and exhumation of Arthur's body are included as Appendix 3 (280–288).

49. Or so he indicates in the *Roman de Rou*, 5313–5316: *Par Deu aïe e par le reil—altrefors Deu servir ne dei—/ m'en fu donee, Deus li rende,/ a Baieues une provender* (With the help of God and the king—the other but for God I serve—I was given, God repay it, a prebend in Bayeux).

50. Chrétien de Troyes, *Les Romans de Chretien de Troyes*, v. III. *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, 1, 26. Hereafter *Lancelot*. *Matiere* and *san* are problematic terms, the literal definitions provided here much debated. Likewise the date: in his translation of Chrétien's romances, Kibler noted that Marie would have gained the title *dame de Chanpaigne* with her marriage in 1159 (*Arthurian Romances* 5); Duggan has suggested that the title as well as the subject of glorified adultery better suit the period of her first regency, when she ruled the county as a widow during her son's minority (18–19).

51. Stephen Knight has argued that *Perceval* predates the fall of Jerusalem and the disaster at Hattin in 1187 (“Jerusalem” 224–25).

52. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le conte du grail*, 11–12. Hereafter *Perceval*. Translations mine.

53. A blow that would surely have stung her husband Henry the Liberal, nephew of King Stephen of England and great grandson of William the Conqueror, whose father had boasted a legitimate claim to the English throne.

54. Around 1165, Gautier d'Arras, a well-known officer at the court of Flanders, addressed his *Eracle* to both Marie and her brother-in-law Thibaut of Blois.

55. Benton includes Andreas Capellanus in his section of authors “doubtfully or erroneously” associated with Marie's court (“Court” 30–31); yet evidence from witness lists as well as the incipit of *On Love* suggest that Andreas did indeed work in the service of the countess.

56. According to Guillaume Picot, Geoffrey of Brittany was Gace Brulé's chief patron. Following Geoffrey's death, the poet entered the regular employ of the otherwise non-patron of literature, Philip Augustus (v. II, 13).

57. Benton cites the closing strophe: *Contesse suer, vostre pris souverain/ vos saut et gart cila cuije me clain/ et par cuije sui pris./ Je ne dipas de celi de Chartain./ La mere Loöys* (Sister countess, may he to whom I appeal, and by whom I am imprisoned, save and guard your sovereign worth. I do not speak of her of Chartres, the mother of Louis, “Court” 19–20). Short doubts the attribution (“Patrons” 239); Picot credits the poem to Richard, but omits from his edition the seventh stanza (v. II, 16–19).

58. Late in the poem the King of Escavalon defers Gauvain's trial so that he can find and

deliver the bleeding lance, destined to destroy England: *toz li roiaimes de Logres,/ Sera destruispar cele lance* (the entire realm of England will be destroyed by this lance, 6166–6171).

59. Side-swapping followed the coronation of Philip Augustus in 1179, the deaths of Louis VII and Henry the Liberal in 1180 and 1181, Philippe of Flanders' open hostility against the monarchy, and the rising influence in continental politics of Henry of Anjou (Baldwin *GPA* 17–25). Spiegel defines the relations between France and Flanders rather as contentious power-struggle (not as alliance or collaboration).
60. Certainly from the time of Louis VI, the Capetian dynasty aligned itself with the Carolingian line it had replaced, “seeking to exploit for [its] benefit the legend of the great Emperor which, thanks to the epics, flourished in France at that time; they may even have contributed to its diffusion” (M. Bloch 388). Abbot Suger of St. Denis in particular developed this ideological framework of the French monarchy (Haidu, *Subject* 107). For a lengthy if ultimately disappointing comparison of Charlemagne and Arthur, see Boutet.
61. *Raoul de Cambrai* *Gormont et Isehart*, and *Charroi de Nîmes*, three “epics of revolt,” all dramatize the violent social repercussions of weak domestic kingship.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. See maps in J. Davies 86, 107.
2. The practice, as opposed to primogeniture, by which land was divided equally among all sons, legitimate and illegitimate both. As Welsh nobles owned their land by lineage rather than by royal gift, partability frequently resulted in violent dispute (Davies, *Conquest* 118; see also the diagrams of violence and conflict in the dynasties of Powys and Deheubarth, 60–61).
3. Prologues printed in Price 183–85: from the southern Cyfnerth Redaction: *Sefa wnaethant h6y pan daruu udunt wneuthur y kyureitheu dodi emelldith Du6 ac un y gynnulleitua honno ac un Gymry benbaladyr ar y neb a torheiy kyfreitheu hynny* (When they had finished making the laws [the lawmakers] placed the curse of God and of that assembly [of lawmakers] and of all Wales on anyone who should break those laws); and from the northern Iorwerth redaction: *A Hewel ar doethyon a wuant ygyt ac efa ossodassant eu hemendyth a'r hon Kemry oil ar y nep yg Kemry a lycreyy kyureythyau hep eu cadv ...* (And Hywel and the wise men who were with him placed their curse and that of all Wales on anyone in Wales who should violate the laws without observing them ...).
4. See O Corrain for an excellent discussion of the “heavy” Romanization of the British Isles, interaction with an “expansionist Germanic world,” and the shared experience of “English aggression.”
5. Henry IF's son Richard withheld royal protection against marcher aggression, and the personal accords he struck with Welsh princes did not survive him.
6. On the comparison between the English-Welsh March and the princely *regna* of continental France, see Crane 19–20, 58, 68–69, 90. The jurisdictional immunity of Marcher lordships lasted until the sixteenth century (Davies, *Lordship*).
7. Henry III's trouble with overly independent Marcher lords is evident in several letters recorded in the *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales*.
8. On the nature of the new relationship being defined between the king of England and the rulers of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, see Carr; Davies “Keeping the Natives in Order.”
9. *Cligés* and *Lancelot* evidently did not appeal to the audiences of Welsh romancers in the same way that *Erec*, *Yvain*, and *Perceval* did, perhaps because neither *Cligés* nor *Lancelot* were insular heroes of Welsh lore. Both are decidedly unique in the corpus of Chrétien, *Cligés* for its authoritative King Arthur and *Lancelot* not only for its cuckold king but for its theme of adultery.
10. Poem cited by Morfydd E. Owen, “Literary Convention and Historical Reality: The Court in the Welsh Poetry of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *Etudes Celtiques* 29 (1992), 69–85: 78–79.
11. As put by Price, “The stress [in the Iorwerth Redaction] on Hywel's authority over all Wales most probably reflected the aspirations of [the thirteenth-century] princes [of Gwynedd]” (“Prologues” 156).

12. The terms of which were negotiated by Llywelyn's wife (John's natural daughter). The truce claimed thirty hostages, significant territory, and it extracted excessive tribute on a principality reduced to Gwynedd and Meiri-onydd only. Llywelyn was also forced to concede that, failing an heir from his marriage with Joan, his territory would revert to the English Crown.
13. For a reconsideration of both Llywelyn's "dynastic policy" and the contested partitions of all three major principalities in the second half of the thirteenth century, see Smith, "Dynastic."
14. *Rhamant(-au)* is a modern Welsh word with no Middle Welsh counterpart; yet its use provides an easy reminder of the tales' Welshing of medieval French tradition—in a way that putting "romance" in quotation marks does not.
15. Henry made much of finding Arthur's grave—as well noted by Gerald of Wales (280–88). Richard adopted Arthur's dragon banner as his own, and claimed to wield Arthur's sword Caliburn. Henry III held Arthurian tournaments called "Round Tables." Edward I, celebrated by Peter Langtoft as having fulfilled Merlin's prophesies, crowns his final victory of Wales with a lavish round-table in Nefyn (Bartlett 251; Davies, *FEE* 31–2, 42; B. L. Jones).
16. Such exaggerated royal weakness cannot accommodate Aronstein's argument, and may explain the omission of *Peredur* from consideration in her article.

NOTES TO PART THREE

1. A question initially posed by Maddox in *ARCdT* (4) is a compelling examination of customary law that envisages Chrétien's five romances as a cohesive project deliberately designed to "explore the legal roots of social instability" (140). Maddox alone has charted Chrétien's Arthurian decline in depth, and my effort to draw French and Welsh texts together as parts of a multicultural whole owes much to this work.
2. In *ARCdT*, this phrase is specific only to Chrétien's romances. Haidu has similarly seen the "conflictuality" of contemporary history to be an integral part of Chrétien's texts ("Romance" 7). The historical and sociopolitical analyses of this section are indebted to both.
3. Arthur wins the White Stag Hunt in *Erec et Enide* and *Gereint*, and he defeats the Witches of Gloucester in the final battle of *Peredur*. In *Ctigés*, civil war between Arthur and his treacherous baron, though reminiscent of the disastrous climax of Geoffrey's *Arthurian*, ends in peace—without the adultery and general annihilation of the *Historia* (Maddox, *ARCdT* 10–11). In *Yvain*, Arthur's judgment cleverly settles the Blackthorn dispute. These episodes will be discussed below.
4. Ingham is writing of differences among the separate insular traditions of fifteenth-century English, Welsh, and Scottish Arthurian romance; her phrase is equally applicable to the materials discussed here.
5. This is Ingham's imagery; she writes that "shared fascinations with Arthur channel antagonisms across insular space" (7).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. The progressively negative shift identifiable in both romance corpora corresponds roughly to the chronology of Chrétien's poems rather than to manuscript tradition. The three Welsh *rhamantau*, extant in two manuscripts—the *White Book of Rhydderch* (ca. 1300–1325), and the *Red Book of Hergest* (ca. 1375–1425)—occur in a different order in both, and they do not form a coherent, successive group. In the two manuscripts which contain all five of Chrétien's romances—Paris BN 1450 and Paris BN 794 (the “Guiot” manuscript), both of the thirteenth century—all five form a unit of successive tales, but they are arranged differently in each manuscript. There is general scholarly agreement on their sequence as well as on the rough period of their composition.
2. e.g., Peters discounted Arthur as fundamentally apolitical, yet included him in his study of inept, useless kings (*Shadow King*); Sargent-Baur has found the Arthur of Chrétien's *Perceval* to represent an abrupt disruption of the tradition (“*Dux bellorum*”).
3. Diverres emphasizes that Arthur “deteriorates after *Cligés*,” that in his final three romances Chrétien transforms his king “into a feeble, even impotent man” (“Arthur” 62). This “declining Arthur makes his first appearance” in the prologue of *Lancelot*, from which point Chrétien “convey[s] that the king is now an old man, who no longer possesses the physical strength nor the intellectual power to rule his realm effectively” (64, 63).
4. Maddox, in a more colorful list, has opposed the “dynamic” Galfridian Arthur to Chrétien's sedentary king “who, depending upon which of the many texts is considered, is not uncommonly depressed, lethargic, hesitant, powerless, concupiscent, incestuous, short-sighted, or even apparently senile” (*ARCdT* 3).
5. Bromwich notes that Chrétien may also have drawn upon another Anglo-Norman version of Geoffrey's *Historia*, such as Gaimar's now lost *Brut* (“First Transmission” 277); Middleton believes that *Gereint*, at least, of the three Welsh tales reflects Galfridian influence (150).
6. Blacker has examined Wace's apparent reluctance to make political blunders by “mis translating” Merlins prophecies (“Ne vuil”).
7. In this regard Wace takes his cue from Geoffrey, who himself expanded significantly on the narrative gaps left in the *Historia Brittonum*.
8. Burgess examines all occurrences of the term in the *Chanson de Roland*, Wace's *Brut*, the three *romans antiques*, the *Lais* of Marie de France, Bérout's *Tristan*, Gautier d'Arras' *Ille et Galeron*, and Chrétien's five romances. See also the discussion of *cortisie* in Zumthor (466–74).
9. Wace defused the potentially explosive combination of “Arthur, Merlin, and the word Britain” that in Geoffrey's work posed such a “deadly threat to English supremacy” (Davies, *FEE* 40).
10. See bibliography for editions; romances and *rhamantau* are cited by line number, *Peredur* by both page and line number. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French and Welsh are mine.

11. On the *Cligés* passage, see Over 102–3.
12. In *Yvain* (3700–09; 3910–28), for example, Gauvain is said to be off searching for Arthur's captured queen—as if absent from *Yvain* while occupied in the narrative action of *Lancelot*; this absence explains his ignorance of his family's plight as well as his unavailability to serve as their champion. Later in *Yvain* (4734–39) we get a *Lancelot* update, with news of both the queen's safe return from Meleaganz' prison and of Lancelot's continued detainment. For the suggestion that Chrétien revised *Yvain* with details from the largely finished *Lancelot*, see Sargent-Baur, “With Catlike Tread” 164–5; also Bruckner, *Shaping Romance* 90–91.
13. An essential text is Haidu, “Narrativity.” Other notable examples of structural analyses of both the French and Welsh texts include Dragonetti; Maddox “Trois sur deux”; Sturm-Maddox and Maddox; Jones “Narrative Structure”; Lloyd-Morgan, “Narrative Structure”; Bollard, “Theme and Meaning.”
14. e.g., Goetinck, *Peredur*; Haidu, “Hermit's Pottage” and “Romance.” Maddox (*ARCdT*) and Knight (*ALS*) have offered influential sociopolitical interpretations of Chrétien's romances; Knight has more recently examined *Peredur* as a postcolonial text (“Resemblance and Menace”).
15. The conclusion of *Peredur* is an exception, and will be discussed in the final chapter.
16. Chief offenders could include Count Angrés of *Cligés*, Meleaganz of *Lancelot*, the Vermillion Knight of *Perceval*, *y Du Trahawc* of *Peredur*; see Duggan's substantial list of “villainous” knights from Chrétien's five texts (320–23); a list of similar length could be compiled from *y tair rhamant*.
17. Detailed structural and textual comparisons (in facing columns) between the Welsh tales and their French counterparts can be found in Thomson's editions of *Owein* (xxix–lvi) and *Gereint* (xxv–lxiii); and in Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study* 41–128.
18. Perceval several times demands to be knighted, to which Arthur twice promises to act *a vostre preu et a m'onor* (to your advantage and my honor 984, 993) but fails to do so. Though no recognizable knighting occurs in the text (972/1066), Perceval understands it to have happened: *Chevalier m'a fait/ Li rois* (the king made me a knight 1367–68). In response to Gornemant's question “where are you from?” Perceval answers *Dont? De la cort le roi Artu* (Where from? From Arthurs court 1368). *Peredur* likewise declares that *py le bynhac y bwyf, gwr idaw vydaf* (wherever I am, I am Arthur's man 15: 19–20), and during his adventures he identifies himself as being *o lys Arthur* (from Arthur's court 21: 27).
19. A narrative pattern only minimally reflected in the Welsh manuscript tradition. In *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (the White Book of Rhydderch), two large capitals mark Arthur's court as the launch pad for new sections of *Peredur: Arthur aoed ygkaer llion ar vysc* (Arthur was at Caer Llion on Usk, column 152); *Arthur aoed ygkaer llion arvyisc priflys idav* (Arthur was at Caer Llion on Usk, his chief court, column 65). See also Roberts, “Peredur” 60. Of the four large capitals in *Owein*, only one marks the king: *Yramheravdyr Arthur oed ygkaer llion arvyisc* (the emperor Arthur was at Caer Llion on Usk, column 223); a single large initial in *Gereint* opens the tale: *Arthur a deuodes dala llys ygkaer llion ar vysc ...* (Arthur's custom was to hold court at Caer Llion on Usk, column 385).

20. Goetinck (*Peredur: A Study* ch. 1) and Roberts (“Y Cysyniad” 56–7) have mistaken the structural importance of Arthur's court for narrative “centrality.”
21. Also credited by Duggan as the earliest Arthurian romance (1); Duggan includes a useful catalogue of other roughly contemporaneous Arthurian tales.
22. *Estre-Gales* is the southwestern kingdom of Deheubarth (1826, 3861); see *Trioedd*, entry for Gereint.
23. A medieval standard of unrestrained liberality, one that Chrétien will evoke again, at least nominally, in the *Cligis* character of Alexander of Constantinople.
24. Chrétien's phrase for the first section of *Erec et Enide*, ending with the conclusion of the White Stag hunt at line 1796.
25. Grimbert's book is an analysis of *Yvain*; but her point is well applicable to the forceful shift here in *Erec*.
26. As Gauvain tells the king: “Sire, fet il, an grant esfroil sont ceanz vostre chevalier./ Tuit parolent de ce beisier:/ bien dient tuit que n'iert ja fet/ que noise et bataille n'i et” (Lord, said Gauvain, these your knights are greatly upset. They all speak of this kiss; they all declare that it will only happen with dissent and battle, 302–306).
27. Defined variously by A. J. Greimas as referring to the knightly class, the action of a noble warrior who fights on horseback, or to warfare (*Dictionnaire*).
28. Bisson, “Feudal Revolution” 22–3, and again in “Reply” 211, where he describes the “bad lordship” of the twelfth century as a correlative to “bad customs.”
29. Though the thrones were gifts to Arthur and his queen, it is Arthur and Erec who sit on them: *Li rois Artus sor l'un s'asist,/ sor l'autre Erec aseoir fist ...* (King Arthur sat on one, and had Erec sit on the other, 6671–72).
30. For an excellent discussion of the Welsh borrowing of *iarll*, see Owen, “Arbennic Milwyr” 93–4.
31. A warm reception at Arthur's court, while not exceptional, is notable in these romances, as is the court's gracious kindness. Cf., e.g., the barely-contained anarchy of *Erec et Enide* (49–58), the caustic bickering that opens *Yvain* (69–141) and *Iadles* (219–25), the disastrous passivity and threatened disaffection of *Lancelot* (80–103), the empty, mournful hall of *Perceval* (854–58; 904–29), or the cowardly ridicule that greets *Peredur* (12:12–26).
32. In his later address to the king, Alexander reiterates this idealized reputation while broaching the possibility of its exaggeration: “Roi, fet il, se de vos ne mant!/ Renomee qui vos renome,/ Des que Dex fist le premier home,/ Ne nasqui de vostre puissance/ Rois qui an Deu eüst creance ...” (King, he said, if Fame who praises you does not lie, no God-fearing king of your equal has been born since God created the first man ... , 336–340).
33. The couplet in Micha's ed.: *Car se ja mes doit los aquerre./ Il l'aquerre an ceste terre* (For if ever fame was to be won, he would win it in this country, 1101–2). Fritz's edition

(Chrétien's *Romans*) prints *guerre* as a variant for *terre* (1104).

34. Cf., the deferred knighting of *Perceval* (972–1066).
35. Alexander himself imports a standard of unrestrained liberality to Arthur's court (178–80, 185–213), encouraged by the tenet of his emperor father *Que largesce est dame et reine/ Qui totes vertuz anlumine* (that largesse is the lady and queen who illuminates all virtues, 189–90).
36. For a broader analysis of structural irony in *Cligés*, see Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance* 25–112; and “Au début.”
37. The brutality of *Amors* motivates three extended internal monologues in which the lovers verbalize the torments inflicted by their allegorical lord: two by Soredamors (468–517; 888–1038), one by Alexander (618–864).
38. The queen later takes over from Love the role of directing and motivating the young couple (e.g., 2241–72).
39. Three times in the first 2343 lines: establishing Gauvain's love for Alexander (391–2), his sibling tie to Soredamors (460–1), and his blessing of the marriage between the two lovers (2314).
40. Alexander's sense of justice (as opposed to Arthur's wrath) is praised by Arthur's army in this passage from the Fritz edition (1349–54) not found in Micha's: *Par l'ost parolent des Grezois,/ Tuit dient que molt est cortois/ Alixandres et bien apris/ Des chevaliers qu'il avoit pris,/ Que au roi nes avoit renduz,/ Qu'il les eüst ars ou penduz* (Through the ranks everyone was speaking of the Greeks, saying that Alexander was courteous and wise not to have delivered the captive knights to the king, for he would have had them burned or hanged).
41. Cf., the queen's light punishment of the vanquished Yder'son of Nut in *Erec et Enide* (*molt prisons legiere*, 1203), and Arthur's subsequent request not only that Yder be released but that he join the king's retinue (1221–26).
42. Yvain recovers *enor* from Keu (2281–92) and eventually proves himself to be the equal of Gauvain (6352–58; 6447–48).
43. A noted comparison; e.g., Grimbart 15; Haidu, “Romance” 9–10, 13. *Yvain* is the only one of Chrétien's romances to open with Arthur's name. Sargent-Baur (“With Catlike Tread”) has called attention to the singularity within Chrétien's works of the *Yvain* “prologue.”
44. The *or* (now) of lines 18, 24, and 29 is opposed to the *lors* (then) of verse 17.
45. Gerald of Wales, for example (who in 1184 was made Henry II's Court Chaplain and political liaison in Wales), in his *Speculum Ecclesiae*, writes of Arthur's tomb to “snuff out the fairy tales” that in his estimation place the Britons on par with the Jews for their credulous stupidity: “According to [the Britons], once [Arthur] has recovered from his wounds this strong and all-powerful King will return to rule over the Britons in the normal way. The result of all this is that they really expect him to come back, just as the Jews, led astray by even greater stupidity, misfortune and misplaced faith, really expect their Messiah to return” (285, 286). On the “new, negative and condescending attitude to

Celtic peoples” that appears in twelfth-century historiography, see Gillingham, “Beginnings” 406.

46. *Mes molt petit au cuer li toche/ qu'ele cuide que l'en ne truisse/ nul chevalier qui sofrir puisse/ mon seignor Gauvain an estor* (But she was not concerned, for she knew that [her sister] would not find a knight who could withstand my lord Gauvain in battle, 5844–47).
47. The narrator describes Arthur as: *li rois qui molt bien savoit/ que la pucele tort avoit/ vers sa seror, trop desleal* (the king who knew very well that the treacherous maiden had wronged her sister, 5903–05). Arthur admits as much to the older sister: *Je le savoe bien pieçal que vos la deseriteiez* (I have known for a long time that you disinherited her, 6384–5).
48. Modern editors take the title from the tale's final line: *A'r chwedyl hwn a elwir Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnwawn* (822), and this tale is called the Tale of the Lady of the Fountain; see further discussion in [Chapter Six](#) below.
49. For a discussion of these titles in reference to a very different icon of literary kingship—the emperor-king Charlemagne of the *Song of Roland*—see Haidu, *Subject* 115–19.
50. Owen emphasizes the very different portraits of aristocratic society found in court praise poetry and *y rhamantau*, a difference made all the more striking by the fact that both are products of the same period and likely of the same courts (“Arbennic” 91). Seven volumes of the work of the *Beirdd y Twysogyon* have been edited (but not yet translated into English), and notable for the context of this study is the overwhelming paucity of Arthurian references to be found in that vast corpus—it is contemporaneous with *y rhamantau*, perhaps, but not at all interested in the world of Arthur's *rhamant* court.
51. Owein takes this post in the waning lines of the *rhamant* (818).
52. She and her realm are mentioned for the final time in 779–81: *A phan doeth odyno [y gyfoeth Iarllles y Ffynnwawn] y duc y iarllles gantaw y llys Arthur; a hi a uu wreic [idawj tra uu yvw hi* (And when he left [the domain of the fountain] he brought the *iarllles* with him to Arthur's court; and she was [Owein's] wife as long as she lived).
53. According to Chrétien, the Lady of Champagne provided the general content—*matiere et san li done et livre/ la confesse*, 26–7)—content that makes *Lancelot* unique in Chrétien's corpus and from which the poet seems to distance himself: *Mes tant dirai ge que mialz oevrel ses comandemanz an ceste oevre/ que sans ne painne que g'i mete* (but I will say that her command is more important in this endeavor than any thought or pain I might put into it, 21–23). Reticence to exaggerate royal weakness with a queen's infidelity might reflect deference for the Capetian monarchy, as Louis VII's divorce from the reputedly unfaithful Eleanor was arguably still fresh in the collective memory of the Champagne elite.
54. Winning out over *Reisons*, *Amors* commands Lancelot to surrender his knightly honor and step onto the cart (365–77). *Amors* also orchestrates burlesque scenes of individual combat, enforcing the hero's service by means of enraptured reveries of the queen: Lancelot fails to see or even hear the Knight of the Ford until he is unhorsed into the water (711–94); and with prodigious, *Amors*-inspired athleticism he later fights Maleagantz backwards, so as not to take his eyes off his beloved (3675–3733).
- 55.

Dividing scholars between two poles, as either “partisans” or “opponents” of the hero, Bruckner less reductively identifies Lancelot as an “unresolved paradox,” as complex and seemingly contradictory as the fictive courtly world he inhabits (“Interpreter’s Dilemma”).

56. In his discussion of literary dramatizations of adultery, Georges Duby describes the serious threat to medieval social order posed by a wife’s sexual infidelity (*Knight* 212–24).

57. Duggan contrasts what he describes as Yvain’s charitable social service (a “new development in Chrétien” that “places charitable conduct toward others at the center of the knight’s concern”) and Lancelot’s failure to measure up to such standards: “no act is more reprehensible in the feudal context than Lancelot’s adultery with his lord’s wife, one of the worst of felonies” (318, 317). As we have seen, knighthood in both *Yvain* and *Iarllles* is ambiguous.

58. Witness to his graveyard feat of strength, a monk recognizes Lancelot as the destined liberator of the captive people of Logres (1900–09, 1967–80). A vavasor is equally convinced that Lancelot will rescue the queen (2116–35), and the vavasor’s son later identifies him as *cil/ qui nos gitera toz d’essil/ et de la grant maleürté/ ou nos avons lonc tans esté* (he who will free us from the exile and the great misery we have endured for so long, 2413–16).

59. As opposed to the inaugural plenary scenes of *Erec* and *Yvain*, where King Arthur holds court in Cardigan, Wales, and Carlisle, Scotland; or the court gatherings at Caer Llion on Usk that open both *Gereint* and *Iarllles*.

60. Both Bruckner and Maddox have shown that Meleaganz’s challenge, conforming to the customs of Arthur’s kingdom of Logres, allows him to challenge for and win Guenievre fairly and with honor (“Interpreter’s Dilemma” 165; *ARCdT* 40).

61. On the “illusion of equality among all levels of courtly society” created by Chrétien’s romances, see Bloch, *MFL* 221.

62. As explained by the narrator of *Yvain*: *fust Kex qui anbricon le roi* (it was Keu who tricked the king, 3917–18).

63. Polar opposite of Gauvain, the always defeated, cowardly, and ill-mannered Keu represents “le niveau le plus bas de la cour arthurienne” (Haidu, “La Valeur” 259).

64. Arthur’s speech, eliciting the confession of guilt that resolves the inheritance dispute of the Blackthorn sisters, provides the single active demonstration in *Yvain* of the king’s supreme judicial authority. Lunette soon after procures her lady’s promise to help reconcile the Knight of the Lion—the estranged husband, Yvain—with his wife, thereby drawing the poem to its concluding image of Arthur’s hero as independent *châtelain*. Here, placing the power of verbal ruse in the antagonistic hands of Keu, Chrétien accentuates the overall impression of Arthur’s diminished courtly power.

65. Chrétien never introduces us to Lancelot as a member of Arthur’s court, and he refrains from naming the hero until more than half-way into the romance (3660)—a technique reserved also for Perceval, not named in his romance before line 3575. By keeping him so distinct from Arthur’s court, Chrétien distinguishes Lancelot in a way that he does not the heroes of his other romances.

66. In response to Gauvain's advice, Arthur mounts his horse and leads the way in pursuit of Keu and the queen. After sighting Keu's riderless horse, Gauvain leads the pursuit, and the narrative makes no mention of the king. Gauvain immediately encounters the unidentified Lancelot, who himself now takes the lead, with Gauvain following closely behind (247–303).
67. To Maddox, Arthur's “unflagging allegiance to customal procedures”—such as the rash boon to Keu that guarantees the success of Meleaganz's initial challenge—creates the general conflict of *Lancelot*, conflict ultimately resolved by heroic restoration of social order: “It is the customal intrigue, not the love intrigue, which provides the narrative with closure (*ARCdT* 41, 48).
68. The conflicting descriptions of knighthood furnished in both tales by the hero's mother will be discussed in [Chapter Six](#).
69. As Arthur later recounts to Perceval, *la roïne devant moi/ Estoit chi venue seoir/ Por conforter et por veoir/ Les chevaliers qui sont blechié* (the queen came to sit here before me, to comfort and see the wounded knights, 952–55).
70. Arthur describes the Vermillion Knight as *li pire anemis que j'aie./ Qui plus me het et plus m'esmaie* (my worst enemy, the man who hates me most and alarms me most, 945–6).
71. The *rhamant* will also keep quiet about any royal intervention on behalf of the ill-treated Peredur, leaving us with the impression of an unruly, unruly court.
72. Owein tries to direct Peredur back to Arthur so that the king can perform the function of ordaining knighthood (15:13–16). Peredur has endured such insult at Arthur's court, however, that he categorically refuses: “*Ny chatwfy vy wyneb,*” *heb y Peredur*, “*ot af*” (“May I lose face if I go,” said Peredur 15:17).
73. *Yna yd aeth y gweisson yn ol y varch a'e arueu y Arthur. A Pheredur a gyfaruu a'r gweisson yn mynet heibaw, ac a gymerth y march a'r arueu, dr weirglawd a gyrchwys* (Then attendants went to fetch Arthur his horse and arms. And Peredur met the attendants going by, and he took the horse and arms, and made for the meadow 41:19–22).

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. A version of this chapter was presented at the Wales and the Welsh 2000 Conference, hosted in Aberystwyth by the University of Wales Center for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It will appear in revised form in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, edited by Helen Fulton, forthcoming from Four Courts Press.
2. Welsh vernacular tradition long pre-dates the emergence of French. Beginning his career around 1165, Chrétien followed closely on the heels of the earliest generation of French romances and histories (Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, c. 1140; Wace's *Brut* and *Roman de Rou*, c. 1155 and 1160–74; the *Roman de Thèbes*, c. 1150). Both Susan Crane and Gabrielle Spiegel have linked literary innovation and pointed political commentary to this mid-twelfth-century rise of the French vernacular.
3. Their examples of such fluid languages include Latin, English, and French. Ruth Harvey, albeit in different terms, has also considered the sociopolitical implications of medieval “zones” of linguistic and literary fluidity.
4. John Gillingham has credited William of Malmesbury with originating the twelfth-century rhetoric opposing Welsh barbarism to French civilization (“Context” and “Beginnings”).
5. On Owain's “friendship” with Henry II, see Gerald of Wales 202–3. See also Davies, *Conquest* 233.
6. See, e.g., Davies, *Conquest* 40–45, *FEF* 145–55; Walker 34–43; Le Patourel, *Norman Empire* 63–70. The Welsh, it should be noted, responded in kind to many such tactics.
7. See, for one, the remark of Richard Fitz Nigel—writing in the late 1170s—that prolific intermarriage in England had rendered the Normans indistinguishable from the English (53–4).
8. John Gillingham has written instead of “Frenchification,” a term inspired by William of Malmesbury's declaration that French culture—its military skill and polished manners—civilized the English (“Beginnings” 394–95).
9. Robert M. Stein, in his article “Making History English,” has traced an opposite shift in Layamon's *Brut* from diversity to “imaginary” wholeness.
10. *Gereint* 1067–8: *Gwiffret Petit y geilw y Freine a'r Saesson ef, a'r Brenhin Bychan y geilw y Kymry ef* (the French and the English call him Gwiffret the Small, and the Welsh call him the Little King).
11. The earliest French epic, *La Chanson de Roland*, vernacular translations of Latin religious poems such as *La Séquence de sainte Eulalie*, hagiographical works including *La Vie de Sainte Alexis*, and the earliest translation into French of a Latin adventure tale, *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, all precede the mid-twelfth-century appearance of French romance.
12. A foreign king recuperates dynastic self-destruction in the *Thèbes*, assuming dominion over Thebes just as the eponymous hero of the *Enéas* deserts his city to become the

destined foreign ruler of New Troy.

13. The minority consciousness is “collective” as well as national, and opposed to a “literature of masters” (17).
14. JanMohamed and Lloyd have also defined minor literature and minority in terms of political positioning; for a larger discussion of “minor” status and nationalism, see D. Lloyd 49–77.
15. Dara Hellman, writing of *Gereint uah Erbin* in “The Mist Earl” (231). A. H. Diverres uses the term *chwedd*, or tale, rather than romance, to emphasize the Welshness of the narrative genre (“*Iarlles y Ffynnaum*”); Siân Echard has discussed the “distinctly Welsh motifs and narrative techniques” that characterize *Peredur* (“Of Parody” 66).
16. See the essays devoted to each of the three *rhamant* in *Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. R. Bromwich. For a consideration of both foreign and traditional elements in *Gereint*, see B. F. Roberts, “Sylwadau” 42.
17. On the influence of native court literature and law on *y rhamantau*, see Middleton 150; B. F. Roberts, “From Traditional Tale,” Owen, “Arbennic.”
18. Generally, English custom preferred primogeniture, descent through women (in the absence of male heirs), and dower rights for women. Welsh custom, in contrast, preferred partability exclusively between legitimate and illegitimate male heirs.
19. Diverres’ article provides a useful discussion of the differences between Welsh and continental French law. Much remains to be written about the separate social concerns of *Iarlls* and *Yvain*.
20. Owen, “Arbennic” 91, describing the typical court praised by the *Beirdd y Tywysogion*, the poets of the Welsh princes.
21. At Arthur’s request, Guenievre grants Yder his liberty only on condition that he join the royal court and household—*et s’il nel fet*, adds the king, *a mal li tort* (and if he refuses, the worse for him 1226).
22. Welsh dress drew the ethnographic attention of Gerald of Wales, who describes it as consisting of a thin cloak and tunic (237). Chrétien too capitalized on *la guise de Gales* in his portrait of Perceval, who wears Welsh-style “pants” that seem more akin to high boots: *braies faites a la guise/ de Gales, ou on fait ensamble/ Braies et cauces, ce me samble* (pants made in the Welsh fashion, where it seems to me they make pants and boots as one, 500–02); later, Chrétien mentions only Perceval’s boots (604, 1160).
23. Frequently in Chrétien’s poems, helmets (as well as unmarked or otherwise indistinct body armor) lead to fierce “incognito battles” such as the one fought between Gauvain and Yvain in the combat-trial of the Blackthorn dispute (*Yvain* 5985–6302).
24. “*A ffwy a gerda gyd a thi, vrth nat vyt vr di y gerdet tir Lloygyr yn unic?*” (And who will you take with you, since you are not a man to travel the land of England alone?, 738–40); “*Dyw a’th gyghoro nu, mab,*” *heb yr Erbin*, “*a llawer dyn a’y hawl arnat yn Lloygyr*” (May God counsel you, son, said Erbin, for [there are] many men with their claim on you in England, 740–42).
- 25.

Gereint unmistakably associates primogeniture with foreign (Anglo-French) practice, though the inheritance dispute between the Blackthorn sisters in *Yvain* challenges its sway on the continent by presenting a case in which justice favors partability. True, Arthur's eventual ruling for partition in that episode proves to be decidedly unequal—the younger sister is made the liege-woman (*fame* 6434) of the elder, and thus holds her territory only as a vassal (6432–40)—but the king does indeed reinvest (*revestir* 6432) the younger sister with her (unspecified) portion of the inheritance. Strict adherence to primogeniture, in other words, shifts on the continent in the course of the twelfth century.

26. R. H. Cline, e.g., in her verse translation of the poem (10n); J. J. Cohen, “Hybrids” 99n8.
27. Knight's title and analysis are based on Bhabha's notion of mimicry, of cultural imitation that “cuts both ways” as a stabilizing tool of colonial power and as a means to deride and rebel against that power.
28. Bhabha elaborates: “The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure ...” (86).
29. As Knight comes very close to doing: “In the medieval Arthurian context, Chrétien de Troyes may well be a Kiplingesque figure, dominating and exploiting, yet also being seduced by, Celticity of various kinds ...” (“Resemblance” 130).
30. Perceval's Welsh garb (602–3) consists of *revelins* (604); Yvonés later tries unsuccessfully to persuade Perceval to replace (*laissier*) his *revelins* and thick, waterproof *chemise* with the Red Knight's silk attire (1152–72).
31. A transformation Perceval initially resists. His change of clothes does not keep him from later identifying himself as *Perchevax li Galois* (3575, 4562).
32. Such cultural stereotypes in general have astounding longevity, and anti-Welsh clichés persist through Shakespeare (see, e.g., Harries), and survive in verbs such as “welshcomb” (to use a “Welsh comb,” or the thumb and forefingers) and “to welsh” (to swindle, or avoid paying a debt)—the first an English idiom referring to lack, the second an expression that has long since crept into American English (see *OED*).
33. Cohen has examined how, in an anecdote recounted by Gerald of Wales, the stereotype of the “grass-eating Welshman” was turned against the waiting army of Henry II—an army too readily convinced that the region was not, after all, worth the effort to conquer and settle (“Hybrids” 86–89).
34. For a different view of the character of Perceval, see Haidu, *Aesthetic* 118–38.
35. And again: “... at least one goal of the text [*Peredur*] is to poke some gentle fun at [Welsh narrative] norms” (69).
36. In general I see more parodie mockery in *Peredur* than does Knight, and less “cultural apology” (141).
37. In “Of Parody,” Echard notes the implication of adultery in the terms *gorderchu* and *gwraig* (71). See Bollard for a different interpretation of the maternal advice offered Peredur (“Theme and Meaning” 78–9, 91n9).
38. To Bhabha, “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace:” the menace of mockery, for

instance, of disrupting and destabilizing the fixity of colonial power and discourse (86, 88).

39. Also at 146, where *Peredur* is described as “a hybridized syncretic dialogue with the culture of the colonizer.”
40. Like Chrétiens Perceval, *Peredur* arms himself with notably Welsh weapons: *A chychwynu racdaw ymdeith a dyrneit gaflacheu blaenllymyny law* (And he set out on his way from there with a fistfull of sharp-pointed darts in his hand, 10:4–5).
41. Though a little drunk at the time, *Peredur* proves to be equally unintimidated by a later adversary, and he greets the one-eyed *Du Trahawc* (Black Oppressor) with similar sarcasm: “*Ryfed yw genhyf kadarnet y dywedy ti dy vot. Pwy a diodes dy lygat?*” (I am amazed that you consider yourself to be so mighty. Who is it that put out your eye?, 44:3–4).
42. Dwarves in medieval French literature are generally irreputable: the cart-driver in *Lancelot*, for example, or Yder's whip-toting servant in *Erec*.
43. The narrative sequence of *Peredur* has attracted much attention, and will not be elaborated on here. For most recent commentary and references, see in particular C. Lloyd-Morgan, “Narrative Structure;” Bollard, “Theme and Meaning;” and Lovecy, “*Historia Peredur*.”

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Notable examples include the work of Susan Crane, Gabrielle Spiegel, Jean Blacker, and Simon Gaunt.

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